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The GATE of FULFILLMENT

Knowles Ridsdale



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The Gate of Fulfillment

By

Knowles Ridsdale



G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press

1920

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THE NEW YORK
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1920

The Gate of Fulfillment

June 22, 1990



The Gate of Fulfillment

WANTED

A secretary-companion. A refined, intelligent, broad-minded, well-educated, gentlewoman, under forty; absolutely unincumbered; of quiet tastes and domestic habits; appreciative of good surroundings, wise enough to remain permanently in a good environment, and willing to take some care of a retired, professional semi-invalid gentleman; neatness and order absolutely indispensable; nurses, school-teachers, curiosity seekers, triflers, divorcees, elderly, half-educated, heavy-footed, cumbersome persons positively must not answer. A sensible woman of equable disposition, able to read well aloud in English and in French, can find a very desirable home, beautifully located, well-equipped with modern conveniences, books, music, and suitable servants. Address in own handwriting, giving full

particulars, qualifications, circumstances, references, and compensation expected.

M. A. L., *Boston Postscript*.

Margaret Bevington read this amazing advertisement to her friend and hostess, Helen Mayberry, as they were having tea in the garden, a wilderness of shrubbery, crimson ramblers, and Canterbury Bells.

"That's my little green gate into the forest, Helen," she said. "I'm going to answer it."

Helen, a curled-up heap of pale-blue fluffiness in the hammock, reached out a hand—"You wouldn't, dear!"

"And why not?" The slight, inscrutable smile characteristic of Mrs. Bevington in certain moods passed over her face. "Think how long I've been wishing for a little green gate to run away through; and inside the gate I'll find a white palfrey, saddled and waiting, and I, clad in a green kirtle, shall mount and ride away, in search of—of what, I wonder?"

“You shan’t ride away to strange men’s houses,” cried Helen; “Jack will never hear of it, nor Kirke—we won’t let you go, Margaret!”

“Listen, Helen;” Margaret Bevington rose and moved away along the garden path and back again before she continued; a slender woman of peculiar lissome grace, with a small head piled high with “young” gray hair, a little irregular face with a delicate square chin which had just escaped being dimpled; a pair of great gray eyes under black brows —a piquant face, full of contradictions. When she spoke her voice held you—a vibrant, full-toned voice of manifold inflections.

“Listen, Helen; some way out I must find—I can’t go on with my own work; that side of my brain is fagged to death. Child, if I had to face current topics classes or give readings this fall, I should ‘go mad and bite the man.’ Yes, I know you and Jack want me to stay here, bless you, but we’ve threshed

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that out so often; idleness isn't rest for me; I must *do*—only I can't talk to any more audiences—" a shadow came into her eyes and veiled them—"and what *is* there for me to do, now?"

Helen sat upright in the hammock.

"But this is impossible," she cried.

Mrs. Bevington smiled again. "And why? Here is a sick man, a querulous, morbid, scornful, disagreeable man, egotistical, selfish, and superior, I grant, but after all, I'll wager, a gentleman. He wants a dignified woman for a dignified position—why not I? It's no use, Helen; I've thought it all out. He may not want me, but I'm going to answer it."

A note of finality in her voice seemed to end discussion.

Helen Mayberry, who had her own ways of accepting matters beyond her affectionate control, made no answer. She idly crumbed a bit of cake into a saucer, poured cream over it, and bent to place it in the grass.

From under a hollycock leaf came a little gray cat, a spirit of a cat, small, and wise. The two women watched her as she lapped the cream, made a pretty toilette, and disappeared through the waving, uncut grass. Then they looked at one another and smiled —a bit uncertainly, perhaps.

“Any tea left, Mrs. Mayberry?”

It was a man’s voice, with an out-of-door ring in its baritone.

The weighted gate swung under an accustomed hand and the owner of the voice appeared through the screening vines—tall, merry-eyed, personable in white flannels, a man of square jaw and athletic shoulders.

Helen waved a hand in greeting.

“You’re late, Kirke Wyndham,” she said. “We ate up all the jam. Make yourself comfy.”

She dropped two lumps of sugar into his cup meditatively.

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“You may not know it, but you’re a direct answer to prayer.”

“You’d better be pretty good to me,” he returned. “Like the person in a forlorn old song, I can tarry but an hour.”

“What’s up?” said Helen.

“Government orders,” he returned. “Report at Washington in the morning—then on to my post. A matter of weeks—perhaps months. I’m taking you in on the way to the station for the 5 o’clock.”

From the brown cottage issued a wail of indignant protest.

Helen started for the house.

“Look after Kirke, Margaret,” she said. “It’s that Bonner boy stirring things up. Yesterday he tied Dick up in the fur rug for a Polar bear and almost smothered him!”

Wyndham turned to Margaret and held out a brown hand, firm and flexible. She let her own rest in it an instant as she rose from the low chair. Then she moved away toward

Helen's little pool, fringed with blue flags and heliotrope.

Wyndham kept pace with her.

"What's wrong, Margaret?"

She smiled a negative—slight—inscrutable.

"You and your mysteries, Margaret! I love you, mysteries and all! Dear, come with me out of all these shadows and introspections. You need the sun."

She looked up and he saw her eyes bright with tears that did not fall.

"You are my oldest friend, Kirke," she said. "But there's to be no more of marriage for me. Friends always, I hope—just that."

"Not enough, Margaret. Yes, I'm selfish—I want you, I want to take care of you. And I've always gotten what I wanted. I'm coming back for you."

"Please don't write me, Kirke. It only hurts."

Wyndham crushed a bit of heliotrope in his fingers and tossed it into the pool.

"All right. I've waited a long time, dear. I can wait a while longer. Remember I'm coming for you, and you are going with me, next time."

He took both her hands.

"Good-by, Kirke. No plans, for they can't come true. And in all else, good luck."

Later, from the windows of her room Margaret Bevington looked out over the tangled garden into the fading sunset, seeing, not the vanishing mysteries of crimson and gold, but the swiftly unfolding vision of a road that led from a lonely childhood through a girlhood of ambition, achievement, and final weariness, to the marriage which had promised peace and had brought instead a refinement of slow and quiet cruelty.

She saw the road bend sharply at the point where death had brought her release, and traveled it once more as it led to vanished health and tortured nerves and a time of mental tor-

ment upon which she dared not pause; then on to sunnier and better places of slow recovery and new heart and a work which had so engrossed her that she had dropped it, exhausted, in a reaction of sick distaste and sicker fear, lest the dark days return upon her.

She turned to her desk and lifted the bank statement that lay there; the sum on the balance side was very small.

Head bent, hands clasped beneath her chin, her eyes dark with brooding, unconsciously she began to walk up and down the room with swift, light steps—up and down—up and down—up and down—she stopped abruptly, as though but just aware of what she did, and sat down by the open window. She had trained herself through the years to sit very still, and so she stayed until the afterglow faded and the dusk fell and deepened into dark, and Helen's voice spoke at her door.

“Coming, dear,” she answered.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. L.

HOLLYHOCK LODGE, MIDDLE WEST, June, 1913.

DEAR SIR:

Though it may seem a far cry from Middle West to Boston, nevertheless I am answering your advertisement in Saturday's *Postscript*, because your requirements seem to accord with my possibilities of fulfillment.

I am a widow, under forty (naturally), without family, with sufficient experience of the world to have developed common sense and to make for broadness of mind. Certain New England forebears dowered me with neatness and order.

I have traveled much and read widely, and am sufficiently versed in French to read it fluently aloud. Several years devoted to the care of an invalid have given me facility for practical helpfulness.

I am not a cumbersome person, mentally nor physically; adaptable, alert, having, I

hope, a sense of humor, and, I should add, the gift of a good reading voice, enhanced by cultivation and practice, and wholly non-elocutionary. I have, too, a goodly capacity for silence.

It is not egotism which leads me to enclose these clippings, but rather that they may in some sort disclose to you something of background, personality, and work.

The latter, however, is an ended phase. A position of dignity, where I am needed, makes a strong appeal.

I am impressed by one fact: that while very explicit as to your requirements, your advertisement fails to state what opportunity you offer for reasonable leisure, other companionship, and a certain freedom of action, all of which, you will recognize, are necessary for the continuance of the equitable disposition you require in your secretary.

Until these matters were known to me I could not rightly estimate a just compensa-

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tion. Will you not have the kindness, if you respond to this, to state your judgment in that practical matter?

As to references, naturally there would be a mutual exchange.

It seems strange thus to catalogue one's qualities, but what is one to do?

I recognize the difficulties of distance, though if this letter reveal to you any fitness, might they not in some manner be overcome?

Very truly yours,

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Have you read *A Room with a View*? If not, it might be worth your while.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., July, 1913.

MRS. MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Dear Madam:—Herein you will find the clippings you so generously sent with your

response (one of fifty-three) to my advertisement.

I would ask your indulgence that I pencil this note, but it is unique even to hear of one so perfectly equipped for all occasions and emergencies. The fact must be of indescribable value to your friends, and I am eternally grateful that I was able, with some slight difficulty, to decipher the list of your qualifications. You have doubtless studied the Reynolds window at Oxford.

I regret that I have been so dilatory in returning your possessions, but the secretary-companion I have engaged is constructed on so usual a plan that I would not risk the embarrassment it would cause her to handle and dispatch the so numerous and eulogistic press comments—doubtless valued by you. However, while I do not expect her to scintillate over a salon, I trust she may be able to turn a pillow if not an epigram, and write legibly if not large.

I know nothing of *A Room with a View*—fiction, I presume, but have heard of a book by a Victorian writer—*The Egoist*.

Again thanking you,

Respectfully yours,

M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE, MIDDLE WEST, July, 1913.

Thank you so much, Mr. Langtree, for the return of the “so eulogistic” comments. Thank you, likewise, for the revelatory epistle which accompanied them. The first, perchance, may be of use to me in the future. The last has the value which attaches to a new experience.

I am sorry you found me too “precious” and too various for sick-room offices. The regret is not all for myself—part of it is for you. More egotism? No, you’re quite wrong there.

But I had thought of you, I confess, in the light of a new experience—an adventure, if you will—in human nature. Anything so coldly intellectual, so ironical, so remote on peaks isolated and insulated, as the vision of you conjured by the advertisement had not been mine to behold. It so breathed distaste for all things common, aversion for all fumblings of mind or hand—was, in short, so marked with the recognized brand of true Bostonese superiority, as to make one want to learn whether you were indeed human, or merely nerves and distilled intellectuality.

'Twould have been good to tilt a lance or so with you, perchance unseat you from that "high horse" which you ride so grandly. Possibly, brought down to level earth, that fine scorn for superfluous cumberers might yield to recognition of a common humanity.

Yes—I know the Reynolds window of all feminine virtues. Had he created a mate for it, clothing the masculine virtues in vivid

glass, I am sure he would have given us a wonderful vision of man's courtesy and chivalry to woman—a vision surely needed, when a man, safe and secure in his castle of self-esteem, can find it within him to answer in caustic tone and ironic spirit a woman who had shown her belief in his gentlehood.

Very truly,

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., July, 1913.

MRS. MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Dear Madam:—Pray excuse me that I have not before written you; I have been unable, and now I much regret that my secretary has omitted to file my answer to your initial letter; a clumsy annoyance, as I should like to refer to it.

I am unable to recall any reason for your so, shall I say indignant, retort. If I have given cause for offense, I apologize. But in self-defense I must say that your letter of last week, following upon the newspaper excerpts, does but confirm my former opinion, that you are possibly somewhat temperamental, and as a consequence would neither have found nor conferred the peace which can be born of poise alone, and which is so essential to a semi-invalid, who, if you will excuse me for so saying, would not at all relish squirming under the microscope of one in search of "an adventure in human nature." It seems to me, my dear madam, that you stand self-convicted. My advertisement distinctly barred curiosity-seekers.

Again I must ask you to excuse me that I write in pencil, the reason, which I perhaps foolishly shrink from mentioning, but will lest I again offend, being a somewhat annoying neuritis which renders pen and ink

impossible. I can but hope you may be able to decipher this.

Respectfully yours,

M. A. LANGTREE.

P. S. Might not the one touch of green amid the autumnal shades of the classic window stand for a promise of the return of chivalry? I assure you I would not consciously wound any woman.

M. A. L.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE, MIDDLE WEST, 1913.

It is my turn to be sorry. Forgive me that I have brought annoyance where you seek for peace; that I have made unkind answer to words that may have been written in pain. I am consoled only by the thought that the episode is too slight to be remembered, and that in forgetting it you will also forget that there ever existed a

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., August, 1913.

What must you think, Helen dear—your friend flown in your absence, leaving only a scribbled note to say she had gone in search of the little green gate in the forest.

To begin with the climax, as they do in newspaper articles, here am I, no longer Margaret Bevington, but plain, very plain, Martha Pratt ("Miss" Pratt, at that) installed in the house of "Marcus Aurelius" as secretary-companion, presumably possessed of all the virtues of the canonized, and finding my work cut out for me.

Yes, I see your amazed face, remembering the icy shower bath of his first epistle, and our thought that the thing had ended with his apology. Whereas, it has only just begun and this is the way of it:

A few days after you were called away by Aunt Anne's illness, "Marcus's" advertise-

ment appeared again in the *Postscript*. It looked like the finger of Fate—and a haven, Helen. His note of apology had proven him a gentleman, though a disgruntled one, else of course I shouldn't have followed it up; but how gain access to him in my own proper person, for I had enclosed that newspaper picture of myself when I sent him the clippings about my public reading?

From some nook of my brain an imp piped up the name of my sainted grandmother. Immediately I had a vision of myself as "Martha Pratt," precise and prim, hair parted in the middle, very contained, reserved, and "New England."

I hied me to a department store, bought the straightest, severest black gown you ever saw, with hemstitched lawn at neck and wrists. A few passes with a comb demolished the irregular pompadour of "young" gray hair that you are so fond of—and oh my dear, you never, never would know me in the hat I bought!

There isn't time now to write of the trip to Boston and my first call on "Marcus"—the position of whose secretary-companion is no sinecure; but Helen, he engaged me without any references; I had forgotten to provide for that contingency and he never asked for them! No wonder; never was any one so truly the image of respectability and propriety; verily the mantle of every Puritan aunt I ever had descended upon me as I sat in his library, was weighed in the balance of his keen brain, and not found wanting.

He is much as we pictured him; a tall, lean, grayhound-build sort of man, with an aristocratic though not at all handsome face; and oh, my child, the identical, long, thin, displeased looking legs in mole-colored trousers that we imagined for him when we first read and laughed over that amazing advertisement!

His face is marked with lines of pain, and his cold gray eyes seem to look with icy aver-

sion on the world and all contained therein. He suffers much from neuritis and is brave under it in a silent, cynical way. His man attends to his personal needs, save for minor and ladylike offices which I render. But there is a large correspondence, many affairs connected with business matters, and—much reading aloud. I preside at table, and how I long for you o' evenings, to laugh with.

The establishment is all that he described, and more, for the grounds run down to the shores of the bay, and from my windows I look out over the sea—the blessed, peace-giving sea.

Write me, Helen, of yourself. My love to you, child.

MARGARET.

Helen Mayberry to Margaret Bevington

HOLLYHOCK LODGE, MIDDLE WEST, Aug., 1913.

Oh Margaret, how could you! Go off to that icy horror of Marble Street. What a

name! I know the house is hideous—and number 13. That alone spells bad 'cess.

I'm holding my thumbs and praying that by now you've had a blazing row. Of course you haven't, for outside myself only Satan can thoroughly know and disapprove that conscientious, see-it-through-to-the-end New England side of you.

You know we all want you. My voice and Jack's fiddle sound like barnyard pugilists without you at the piano to enforce harmony. The kiddies are disconsolate. They won't believe the Pied Piper is the same story you started to tell them. Sleepy-time is not at all what it used to be.

As for the garden, it's possessed of a demon. The hollyhocks simply won't stay staked. They break loose at every capful of wind and fall about like drunken soldiers.

Nobody sits in the blue and white sling chair—I can't believe it ever was funny, standing on its hind legs like "Tall Agrippa"

when you tried to put it in shape. You were so joyously clumsy about it. No one else could get it wrong in so many different ways.

And now—well, it's very damn, and I feel like doing my hair in ringlets, wearing a dark brown dress with pointed basque and a great many gathers, and composing a poem like Ann Eliza Cooke—We shall meet but we shall miss her!

I shan't because I'd look like a buff Orpington, heavy on corn but short on range. Most unbecoming.

What if the man did apologize. Why shouldn't he?

And now you're Miss Pratt. With your lovely silver fluff of halo parted in the middle and done down low! When I read that to Jack he said, "The devil she has," and went away whistling *The Irish Washerwoman*.

And why "Miss" in a strange man's house? Not that it matters—he sounds so deadly correct. If one only felt he'd abduct

you and carry you off to a fortress in the mountains, then Kirke could rescue you with an Italian opera chorus, and everybody could live happily ever afterwards.

I'm dying to hear more of the ogre. Isn't it funny he should wear those mole trousers and be so like we pictured him. Pshaw! I have no patience with his neuritis.

I'm having my blue voile made. How I wish you were here to make suggestions. Jack says I can't have a slit skirt, and how am I ever to get up the steps if I don't?

Oh dear, I had forgotten you are wearing black. And those awful hemstitched things, fit only for deaconesses. What do you do about dinner dress?

Margaret, you're a wuzz. I don't know what particular brand of devil a wuzz is, but it's something awful. It's Dickie's most annihilating anathema for all those particularly exasperating.

Jack had a letter from good old Kirke

Wyndham yesterday, in which he says: "Tell Margaret not to forget." So I mean to hitch my hopes to him.

He's such a trump, has lashings of money, and he loves you with every bit of himself. And you know, Margaret, you did' let him seem to belong to you. I wonder—well, never mind. Isn't it awful to have to observe the courtesies when you really want to know!

Do give it up and come back to us. Jack and I want you more than anyone on earth. The chicks adore you, and the garden howls for your helping hand. Come home.

Lovingly,
HELEN.

P. S. Nobody else shall ever sleep in the rose-colored room.

P. S. No. 2. I spoiled three perfectly good envelopes trying to address Miss Martha Pratt.

Her split skirt so tight and so smart
Ripped up when she made a quick start,

And revealed—how it rankles—
Much more than her ankles.
They brought her home meek in a cart.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., August, 1913.

You're the same fearful and wonderful joy
that you always were, Helen, with your
weird Limericks and all the rest of it.

The Lord knows how I miss you, and your
little absurdities and the everlasting trum-
someness of you, but I can't go home now.
I'm in for it.

I seem to have come—a Bevington-to-the-
rescue kind of thing. Marcus Aurelius is a
frightfully alone person. You know how I'm
lured by the thought that anybody needs me
—my special sort of vanity, you told me
once, in one of your frequent and illuminating
moments of putting me down a peg.

And I'm selfish about it in another way.

It is mighty good to get away from the world and not have to talk for a living. I think the Trappist monks must have conducted current topics classes before they took the vows of silence.

Thank heaven Marcus doesn't have to have his head stuffed with Maeterlinck and Shakespeare, nor have the happenings of the day in the four quarters of the earth boiled down into tabloid, peptonized form to suit his mental digestive apparatus. To be sure, I read aloud to him, but he does his own assimilating.

Marcus is a retired surgeon, though, after the English manner, he disdains the title of "Doctor" and is always plain Mr. Langtree.

I imagine he must have been a man of prominence before he became ill. He has the trusteeship of several estates, and this gives plenty of occupation to his secretary-companion.

I file in pigeonholes, Helen—I docket, I

inscribe, I make wonderful lines on the back of documents with red ink and a ruler—you should see me; and oh, how I love the bottle of red ink! Why did I never know about red ink before? It's like a liquid jewel—a poem should be written to it.

My days are chiefly spent in Marcus Aurelius' study on the first floor, a room of noble proportions, paneled in old dark oak and lined with books to the beamed ceiling—books that have lived there together so long that they have woven themselves into a rare fabric of rich-toned color.

There are some good rugs on the floor, one, a Royal Kirmanshah, lying just where the western sun brings out wonderful hints of crimson.

The focal point of the room is the deep embrasure with leaded windows, where Marcus sits, hour after hour. I wish I could draw the little picture for you, Helen.

The man and the chair seem to have been

made for one another—the long, thin, distinguished figure, with its slender, sensitive hands and narrow, aristocratic feet; the dignified, high-backed chair of black oak, inclined at an angle to give him ease with a certain stern support; his arms extending along the hard, oaken arms of the chair, his lean, well-modeled head against the dark brown cushions.

Beside the chair is a quaint, old-fashioned ottoman sort of thing, with heavy carved feet. It is covered with a bit of rare tapestry, and seems to have no reason for being in that spot, but it always stands there.

The portrait of his grandmother, the Marquise de St. Foire, if you please, hangs on the wall, an old, time-darkened painting in oil, showing a woman young, distingué, decidedly of the old aristocratic régime of France. Sometimes, in his moments of abstraction, I amuse myself by tracing out resemblances between my host and the *grande dame* of the portrait.

Though he has apparently cut himself off quite determinedly from Boston, he seems to keep in intimate touch with France.

He owns the ancestral château near St. Dizier, on the Marne, not far from Paris, as we count distance here, and spent years in France, in his childhood, then in study, and finally in practice in Paris hospitals.

He expends much thought on the care of his French patrimony, and is evidently much attached to France and her people. Blessed be my own years there, which gave me facile use of the language.

The embrasure holds likewise a large, heavy black oak table with many long drawers at the sides, and handsome, plain, writing materials, and here I sit and take dictation in my "library" handwriting, for which praise the Lord—little did I know when I practiced it to what use I should put that clerkly chirography, so unlike this bold and dashing hand which is second nature.

But there are other things besides business; we drive every day, a pair of handsome black horses and a well-set-up old-fashioned carriage, with a quaint coachman. I've accomplished that much; Marcus rarely went out before I came, and the horses took perfunctory exercise. I gather that he has a bitter aversion toward automobiles.

Then I read to him—much politics, many medical journals. And besides that, I am writing a sonata to his dictation.

This last makes me very sorry for him. He is an accomplished pianist and a connoisseur of music of all kinds. His musical library is very unusual.

One day when I came in for the morning reading of the papers, I found him with a music manuscript on the table before him. He was turning the pages over slowly and gently, and after a bit took up a pencil and tried to write some notes. It wasn't any use—the effort gave him too much pain.

When he saw me he gathered up the pages and handed them to me.

"Please put it away in the farther drawer," he said. "I shall never finish it."

I asked him to dictate it to me, and after a thoughtful silence he bowed assent.

We've worked at it at intervals; it is going to be beautiful, I think, in a clear, gemlike way. Anyway I'm glad he has it for a bit of interest; he becomes more human when he works at it, and life is pretty empty for him, he has so cut himself off from men.

In fact, the only man who comes here is his physician, Dr. Perkins, good, cheery, twinkling Dr. Perkins, ruddy, a little stoutish, carrying a few strange pills in his waistcoat pocket. No "professional" manner, no sick-room cant. He has a red automobile with a cheerful honk, and toots away loudly to announce his arrival, whereat Marcus winces. However, there seems to be a good friendship between them.

Here I was interrupted, and something so odd has happened—Marcus has written to “Mrs. Margaret Bevington,” and the letter has been posted to her at Hollyhock Lodge. I saw it on top of the packet of letters he gave to Barkins to post this morning!

So when it reaches there, dear, please slip it into another envelope, and send it here to “Martha Pratt.”

He's been scribbling painfully away in pencil, little dreaming that “Margaret Bevington” was quietly engaged on his affairs not six feet distant from his armchair.

We went to Symphony Hall the other night to hear Kubelik and the Boston Symphony orchestra. 'Twas glorious—little Jan raced the orchestra through the Mendelssohn concerto at an absolutely neck-break pace, and that perfectly trained, perfectly self-satisfied body had to hustle to keep up.

I very nearly revealed myself as a temperamental person and a lover of music by mad

applause and one enthusiastic speech, and remembered my pose just in time to draw on the mask of Miss Pratt once more.

I don't dare to let down the bars that I've erected against myself, Helen; it's only by repressing my troublesome "temperament" altogether that I am able to figure as the staid and quiet person of the pigeonholes and the red ink bottle that he desires in his secretary.

He is strangely responsive to music and it is curious to watch him out of the tail of my eye, as he listens to it, for he listens with his entire face, as it were—head erect, eyes closed, and every feature keeping rhythmic and almost invisible time to each note and phrase, and yet his countenance seems to remain immobile; it is difficult to describe and I am certain he is unconscious of it.

Such a long yarn, Helen, and I could write as much more. My love to you, dear, and to Jack and the kiddies, bless them.

MARGARET.

Oh, the "Miss" Pratt was just an accident. Of course I had no cards for my new self; the servant misunderstood and announced me as "Miss Pratt," and I let it stand. After all, why not make the masquerade complete?

Happy for me that Kirke went off to build more bridges. I trust you to keep him from finding out about this. It's hard to know oneself.

I wonder if Kirke were one reason why I ran away.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., August, 1913.

MRS. MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Dear Madam:—I find myself both awkward and amazed, in addressing a letter where none can be either desired or expected. Also, my facility for expression, in matters other than professional, is scant. I have not attempted a personal communication, until

within the past weeks, since—for a very long time, and not being a man of moods I cannot imagine why I have broken my custom.

Still, I should be but a poor dumb brute did I not thank you for your generous note. It showed a depth of understanding all too rare. Pray do not be distressed; there is nothing to forgive, but only to regret your too great temperamental sensitiveness to the mere thought of physical pain, which goes far to prove that I was correct in adjudging you mistaken in thinking yourself fitted to face the practicalities unavoidable in an establishment such as mine.

I cannot promise to forget that there exists a Mrs. Margaret Bevington, since she administered the trouncing I must have been in need of. My last trial (I use the word advisedly) in secretaries departed with electric rapidity, having torn to fragments a partly finished business letter, scattered it, in effect, like a melodramatic snowstorm, with herself

as heroine, and rushed from the room, informing me that I was an evil-tempered demon.

I have since wondered very much what could have been in that first letter I sent you, and which you have, of course, destroyed, to call forth such a reply.

My new secretary, Miss Pratt (Berkshire Pratts, I presume), a capable, self-contained, orderly young woman, has not as yet been able to unearth either it or your first letter from the chaotic mass of manuscript left by the lady of uncontrolled speech and—heaven defend me from them—unimpeachable references. Still, I feel it could not have been the epistle I should have written under ordinary circumstances, and can but reiterate my regret.

Pardon the length of this letter; I had forgotten I was writing until Miss Pratt, who is punctuality itself in some sort of black clothes and stiff collars, called my attention to

the existence of the particularly disagreeable drops my tyrannically good friend, Dr. Perkins, insists upon.

Very sincerely,

M. A. LANGTREE.

P. S. Would it be taxing your kindness too greatly to ask you the name of a book mentioned in one of your letters? It seems scarcely fair to keep Miss Pratt on my own dry literary diet all the time. Of course she could supply herself, but it seems somewhat boorish not to have considered something for her to read in her leisure moments, and I am very ignorant on the good fiction of the day. I again thank you.

M. A. L.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., August, 1913.

Helen dear—the game is on. Here's a letter to Marcus, in answer to the one you

forwarded to me. Please post it, for it must bear the Middle West post mark. This is a queer twist in the masquerade, but the more fun. No more now—I must drop his drops. Love to you—

MARGARET.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, August, 1913.

"Twas *A Room with a View*, Mr. Langtree, a book of whim-wham wisdom and sane philosophy conveyed in the vehicle of a joyous tale. It's the kind of story that is meant for two sorts of folk—those who "understand"—and those who need it.

I remember thinking when I mentioned it to you that you were of the latter type; that you dwelt all alone in "the house of yourself"—a house that held no room with a view over the beautiful world of humanity—a house sufficient to itself, with no need of neigh-

bors; an aloof and unsympathetic house, to whose door none ever came in trouble, and within whose walls your soul sat solitary, embittered, and self-satisfied; a soul that never laughed, that never smiled in indulgence of human foible, that had no patience with imperfection.

This is a confession, you see, of further daring, and a plea for more forgiveness, that I judged thus rashly (a way I have of visioning things) for your last letter makes me feel that I was wrong; that somewhere in that house there *is* a room with a view—perhaps with blinds drawn and long unvisited—but *there*.

I wonder why I write this way to you—a man of reserves and reticences—it is not like me to intrude thereon—and yet from the first I have been impelled to plain speaking with you—and unafraid.

Sincerely yours,

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Jack Mayberry to Margaret Bevington

(This letter smells strongly of cigar smoke.)

FINE ARTS BUILDING,
MIDDLE WEST, September, 1913.

DEAR MARGARET:

Enclosed find letter, supposedly from His Nibs of Marble Street.

For the love of Mike, prove yourself the sport I know you are, and never—no, never—let Helen know I've carried the thing in my pocket for exactly ten days, or I shall be obliged to enact the role of first villain in that threadbare domestic drama—*The Busted Trust*.

I'm awfully sorry I forgot it, but fact is I've been swatting to get my stuff in shape for my exhibition, which opens early next month. Eighteen canvasses in all, and you'd forgive me if you could see them, for I swear by Michael Angelo not one of 'em need seek a shady corner.

I'd give my hat if you could see the Madonna of the Roses. That was a wonderful pose, my girl—you in your rose frock, with chubby Jackie reaching his dimpled fist for the La France you held toward him, while that glorious rambler sprangled all over the background.

And such lights! The warm heart of the summer's in it; the rose scent soaks into your soul. Yes, it's a big thing, Margaret,—I can say it to you, you won't think I'm a blatant ass. Also, you helped do it, with your mothering eyes, your wonderful hands, and your glorious hair.

Suffering cats—Helen says you've parted it and plastered it down. I enclose sketch as you must look—all out of drawing; you can't stand that foreshortened effect.

Oh heck—well, go on with your literary merry-go-round and your Bostonese mummy. One thing I'm glad of; your putting it over on him in the way you're doing is as smooth

a comeback at that advertisement as the opposition ever could wish for. It's a landslide.

Meanwhile, be good to yourself. A recent letter from Kirke gives me a heavy-father feeling of responsibility regarding you; he's so all-fired trustful I'll hand you over to him safe and sound that, by Jove, I feel I've got to do it. How in torment would he feel if he knew what you were up to this minute?

He's such a corking good scout, Margaret. Hang it all, you can't keep him waiting forever. Also, be it remembered that he's six feet two, and broad in proportion. Who is going to gather up the fragments of me if he hands me a wallop with a will?

Better come back, my girl.

Helen would send tubs of love, but, bless her fluffy head, in all ignorance of my shortcomings she's out rooting for hubby. She doesn't know a Van Dyke from a valentine and doesn't care, but she's the loyalest helper ever a man had, and when it comes to social

stunts she's hard to beat. She'll draw 'em in like a magnet, and then—well, then the canvasses must do the rest.

So take time off to send up a prayer for me on the first. Even Pratts have a right to hours of devotion in a good cause.

Say, Margaret, don't rub it in too hard—it must be pretty tough pulling for a chap when his hands won't do what his head directs. I'm sorry for the old curmudgeon. All the same, I bet you the best bunch of flowers in Boston to a tuppenny bit that you can't get him out of his movie clothes and into a sure-enough sack suit, dribbling tie, and soft hat inside of three months. You may as well send along the coin and I'll wear it on my watch chain. You're clever, but there are some things even you can't do.

Yours,

JACK.

A fair dame by name Margaret B.
Was wished as a trust upon me;

She was bound she would roam,
But her swain came back home;
My initials are now R. I. P.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., September, 1913.

MY DEAR MRS. BEVINGTON:

Thank you. I have sent to Boston for *A Room with a View*, and if eastern architecture admits the existence of such an apartment I expect to possess it within a day or so. I think, however, I shall not pass it on to Miss Pratt, who, excellent though she be, prefers politics, it seems, to fiction, for which I should be duly grateful. She reads the debates with clarity and understanding unusual in a woman, and although she does not express them, has I imagine, very decided opinions concerning the tariff and currency bills.

I am in daily terror of discovering a suffra-

gette in the wearer of that somewhat harsh but doubtless durable bombazine gown.

I am sorry that you regard me as an ogre; I simply view the world from the standpoint of reason and experience; before my accident I too indulged in visions of a soul house enhanced by many windows, but—well—either they never were, or else life's masons have walled them up, a week ago I should have said wisely, but perhaps because I have been out of doors more than in years (Miss Pratt taking it for granted that I drive every day and I dislike to deprive her of the diversion) I have a desire to find an aperture facing Middle West, from whence come the fearless breezes of your varied letters.

By the way, what would your experience lead you to think of a woman who takes musical dictation almost faultlessly, yet professes indifference to music; calls Kubelik "Little Jan"; who sits on the edge of her chair in a quiver of emotion while he, accom-

panied by our incomparable orchestra, plays the Mendelssohn concerto—in which his *tempo* is a miracle; removes her gloves in order to applaud with sufficient force, exclaiming, "Isn't it magnificent fun?" apparently filled with the spirit of the thing, and then lapses into an attitude of absolute boredom, and when her attention is called to the plastic beauty of his bowing hand, yawns and wonders if his laundry is less expensive because he wears no cuff on his right wrist?

I confess she puzzles me. As I look up I see her at the other end of the room, severely garbed, serenely preparing those atrocious drops with a pair of exceedingly fine and expressive hands, whose touch is sure but noiseless. She would have made an excellent burglar, if one could conceive of Miss Pratt entering any house save by the front door and *in propria persona*. And I really shouldn't denounce the drops; I think they must be cu-

mulative in effect, for, while I have taken them for months, it's only within the last week or so that I have noticed any improvement.

I wonder, my dear Mrs. Bevington, if you can imagine how hopelessly small it makes a man feel to be spoon-fed, and with medicine at that?

Ah, here comes Miss Pratt. Forgive me that I have so encroached on your time. I can but say in extenuation that this new-old exercise of writing holds a sort of lure.

Sincerely yours,
M. A. LANGTREE.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

(Written in a very wavering hand.)

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., Sept., 1913.

MRS. MARGARET BEVINGTON.

DEAR MADAM:

I crave your indulgence that I again write, if such feeble tracery be worthy the

word, but your long silence, together with one or two somewhat caustic remarks from Miss Pratt as to the man of to-day taking too much for granted, have shrewdly brought home to me my mistake in addressing as a friend a lady I have never even seen.

I can but attribute my lapse to the unusual amount of ozone indulged in, together with Miss Pratt's persistent belief in, and punctual administration of, Dr. Perkins's remedy. One or both must have gone to my head and robbed me of my usually sane, if dearly bought, knowledge of things as they are.

Pray do not misunderstand my reference to Miss Pratt's remarks. She is courtesy and conscientiousness personified, and is in all probability quite unaware of a slight unevenness of disposition. I can but trust she is not subject to those abominations of the Lord—moods.

Pardon my digression; I did not intend to write of Miss Pratt.

I do not know if your letters were prompted by kindness or caprice; in any case, thank you. If my replies brought you diversion I were but a poor philosopher to be anything but grateful for even a brief return to my old pleasant, if mythical, beliefs, and should not complain when the curtain falls and the lights go out.

It was unpardonable of me to presume; I apologize, and with renewed respect for the wisdom of Ulysses in his use of the wax and the chain, permit me, my dear Mrs. Bevington, to subscribe myself,

Respectfully yours,
M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., Oct., 1913.

And so the exhibition is on, dear, and I've been devouring the papers. I want to take the first train westward, that I might embrace

each blessed critic; how good they've been, but none too good; Jack deserves the best that can be said.

Helen, I'm leading a double life with a vengeance; sitting beside Marcus as plain Miss Pratt in what he calls "bombazine," and corresponding with him as the mysterious Mrs. Bevington. We've nearly come to blows, indirectly, because of it.

I've been a long time answering his latest letter, as you know; he was taking a little too much for granted in expecting me to write as a matter of course, and so, in the person of Miss Pratt, I generalized on the subject of men as a whole, and let him know—a bit tartly perhaps,—what I thought of that sort of thing.

He kept watching the postman from day to day with the oddest sort of concealed eagerness, and when no Middle West letter came, drew a proud veil over his disappointment. Finally he wrote again to Mrs. Bevington,

and in the interval of waiting for a reply he has grown intensely irritable.

The more irritable he is, the more polite; the lower and colder grows his always level eastern voice, the more displeased the expression of his legs; he has the most expressive legs I have ever seen, Helen, it's uncanny—as though each one had a brain of its own.

It is salutary discipline, this waiting; he's been too used to commands obeyed; but it's a trifle hard on Miss Pratt; he seems to think it all my fault. We drive, and the wind is from the east; I read aloud and all the universe is wrong; he refuses to drive, and Dr. Perkins takes me to the shrines of Concord, whereat he is "neglected."

He asked me to play for him (oh yes, that cat came out of the bag in connection with the sonata).

It was my turn then; I stood by the table, resting the tips of my fingers upon it.

"Play to me," he said.

"No," I answered, very quietly.

"And pray why not?"

"'Twas not nominated in the bond, Mr. Langtree," I said, looking him straight in the eye. "I am willing to render the pound of flesh, but not with musical accompaniment."

He turned white with anger, and then Dr. Perkins came to take me to drive.

Marcus has been in a strange mood ever since, very quiet, perfectly courteous, speaking seldom, asking as little as possible of me. I see an apology coming, but it will come hard. He'll have a letter from Margaret Bevington in a few days; we'll see whether the skies will clear.

What strange, simple, childlike creatures men are, the wisest and coldest of them.

Good night, Helen. Love and love to you all.

MARGARET.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, Oct., 1913.

Ah, Mr. Langtree, what mood was *yours* when you wrote me—that of a child deprived of a new toy, or of a sick man who had thought he found in a stranger something of the understanding he had long denied himself from friends? Both, perhaps, for you really are a man of moods, no end of them—hard lines, I fancy, for folk about you.

As for the rest, I'm glad Miss Pratt let in the light, for I fear me you are too much a man of intellect to be a man of understanding, and since, as you now know, I could not well have written, I—I should have been sorry had the window facing Middle West remained closed.

You mustn't apologize to me *any more*; just “take it for granted” I understand; toss those moods of yours westward when they become too much for you—and Miss Pratt.

No, it has never been caprice; I hardly know just what; a bit of speech in the darkness, perhaps—your voice spoke to me and it was written that I answer.

Why analyze? 'Tis not my way thus to spoil the inner things by minute dissections nor to question of the primary causes which make the wind to blow from the east or from the west.

What little rift is this in the harmony of Miss Pratt—are you learning that she, too, is human, "even as you and I"?

I wonder what it's like to be with you as she is, to dwell within the influence of that refined scorn which is your aura, to breathe the rarefied atmosphere of 13 Marble Street.

I believe you were right, and things are best as they are. We're better friends at a distance.

You ask me to judge Miss Pratt from my experience, but you forget that she is as much a surprise to me as to you. I fancy from

what you tell me that Miss Pratt must be in a class by herself.

Good-night.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Your "incomparable orchestra"? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. There's Nikisch, you know, and his band of Londoners, weaving sounds, delicate and fine as cobwebs, and flinging them like shimmering, floating gossamer into the air; and Stokowski and his men of Cincinnati—oh yes, young and perhaps sometimes not so highly finished, but playing with such splendid ardor, like the spirit of the west set to music. But it waxes late—we must fight this out anon.

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., Oct., 1913.

MY DEAR MRS. BEVINGTON:

Of course you are wrong in many points, but they must stand aside for the moment

while I tell you how genuinely relieved I was to get your letter. There is nothing so galling to a man as to feel that he has forced himself into a situation where he is unwelcome, and, while you make me understand the delicacy of your position, isn't there a great deal on my side?

I waited so long for your letter, and Miss Pratt's remarks seemed to fit in so well with your silence, that one might almost have imagined the impossible—that you had banded together in order to show me how undesirable, and unnecessary, is mere man.

But now—now you say you would not have the Middle West window closed. How good you are, and how I have missed the reviving breezes from that point of the compass.

And I'm not to apologize? Thank you, I didn't realize I had been doing it, for there is nothing that is harder for me. I thought I had trained myself to a point where it would never be necessary to ask pardon, by avoiding

giving offense. My circle of acquaintance is limited and I endeavor to maintain absolute balance.

You say, I have "denied myself from friends." No, but when a man is so fated that he cannot do, and be, and go, as do others, he is dropped out, left behind, as it were, in a world of his own, and in time forgotten.

Perhaps I do analyze a bit too much—a fault attributable to my one-time profession—but I absolutely deny the moods. If there be one thing more than another that I abhor it is those temperamental spasms.

Speaking of which, of course Miss Pratt is as surprising to you as she was, and I confess still *is*, to me; while a peerless secretary—and I should be a judge—she will withhold or give of herself in most unexpected manner.

To wit, while copying musical manuscript for me she suddenly informed me that a certain passage would be vastly improved by a

slight alteration in phrasing, to prove which she went to the piano and executed the difference.

I am free to admit that she was right, and her tone and technique were such as to assure one not only of acute musical perception but also of finished training.

I would have given much for the privilege of listening longer, but the passage finished, she rose, closed the piano as if it were a roll-top desk, and went on with the manuscript.

When a few days later I asked her to play for me, she absolutely refused and addressed me as a modern Shylock.

Next day, not wishing to drive myself, I saw her from the library window, being tucked into Perkins's automobile, wearing some sort of dark velvet headcovering with a flash of scarlet at the side, absolutely unlike anything I should have imagined Miss Pratt to possess. It changed the whole expression of her. I might have been looking from a

window in Paris, where each woman's head is a flower, upon which is poised a gleaming butterfly.

Now do not misunderstand me. Perkins is my old and valued friend, but why any woman of sense should allow herself to be chugged unlimited miles in that nerve-destroying go-devil, while its driver expatiates on speed records, gear boxes, and missing engines, is beyond my comprehension.

However, she seemed to enjoy it, for they were gone an unconscionable time, and on their return I heard them talking in the hall, Perkins quite taking it for granted that they would try it again soon, and Miss Pratt laughing in apparent assent—I never heard her laugh before—and then Perkins blustered in, having made the astonishing discovery that Miss Pratt is an unusually worth-while woman.

Five minutes later came the lady herself, composed, serious, conscientiously bearing

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those infernal drops, which Perkins had the effrontery to say were just on time, when I could have sworn before any court in the land they had been away at least three hours.

Women are certainly complex. I am sure you, with your rare understanding, will admit it is a somewhat exasperating incident.

This is not a "rarefied atmosphere," and I cannot agree with you that we are better friends at a distance. If we could talk things out I am sure you would see my point of view more clearly.

For instance, our "incomparable"—I will say it—orchestra. Nikisch, yes, once in a while; one would not wish comets every day; and your other man is, as you say, young; but for year-in and year-out musical food—the Boston Symphony.

I know you would agree with me if you were not of that, shall I say over-enthusiastic Middle West which has all the assurance of youth, and from whence I shall hope for a

not too-long-delayed letter to help me keep the window open.

Sincerely yours,
M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, Oct., 1913.

The time of the gathering of the bitter-sweet has come—to-day I have answered the call, walking miles in the October sunshine and returning with arms laden with scarlet treasure.

It's a strange call that lures you forth; I wonder if it is ever heard in Boston, or if the voice is silent east of the Great Lakes?

I hear it most clearly on these autumnal Sunday mornings, when the air is like golden wine; when the elect array themselves in garments sacred to the Sabbath and fill the street cars with best raiment and mingled polite odors of affluence, sanctity, and orris.

Among these softly rustling Birds of Paradise I take quiet Pagan place, wearing my third best suit; carrying a sharp knife and the sandwiches which later are to sustain exuberant spirits. Beside me the day's companion—the bittersweet happiness is of a kind that must be rightly shared.

The street car carries us free of the city and we take to the open road which skirts the great blue inland sea, above the white sands of the shore, where crisp-curled waves cast foaming crowns. We pass the woods and fields of St. Ignatius and the meadow where the fat seminary kine are browsing.

The wine of the air goes to the head, and we walk as though with winged feet, turning finally into a by-road thick-arched with old elms. At noon we stop at a lonely house hidden by close-set cedars, where live a strange old man, a sad-eyed woman, and a savage dog.

The woman is glad to see us; no one comes along their road now since the upper road became the highway, "and the sight of folks does her heart good."

She brings coffee to us under the trees, and doesn't want to take the bits of silver we press upon her. "It's been a pleasure," she says, and then tells us of the troubles that dwell with her.

More miles—and then the bittersweet; a high thicket of thorn-apple trees and twisted vine heavy-hung with scarlet treasure—and we the first to find it! To those who hear the call and believe in its philosophy, that means more than the fairy gold at the end of the rainbow.

We gather and load ourselves—a second Birnamwood, and walk westward through fields into the sunset and the afterglow of topaz and gold.

When we reach the city the dark has fallen. The downtown streets are garish with the

white blaze of electric lights and swarming with the surging life that streams through them o' Sunday evenings.

A woman's voice spoke back of us—high-pitched, harsh, a crash of discord, jangled and broken. "God, ain't it pretty—what is it?" She was painted and bleached and shabbily bedizened, her mouth hard, her eyes dead-weary and yet all-eager.

I filled her hands with trailing sprays. "It's bittersweet," I told her. "It grows in the country."

"I didn't know there was such things," she said, repeating, "In the country—bittersweet."

The car stopped where the lights were brightest, the crowds thickest and gayest. She alighted and was swallowed up in the blazing night and the uncaring throng, clasping the bittersweet close, while we came on to the peace of home.

So I send you a little share in the day—

there are so many things in heaven and earth—

Good-night.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., October, 1913.

DEAR MRS. BEVINGTON:

Birnamwood has come to Dunsinane; I also did not know there were such things—“bittersweet—the country.”

I had forgotten, until your word picture caused these walls to crumble and let in the sights, the sounds, the scents, of plateau, stream, and wood. Not your bittersweet and thorn-apple tangle, but the green and golden slopes of France, the land to which I gave my boyhood’s love.

Do you know the hills and valleys of the Marne, in the old province of Champagne? Have you ever traversed the little-used road

between Montierame and Bar-sur-Aube? Did you halt and rest beneath the shade of ancient trees which sentinel faithfully the château of Beauprey de Lorme, whose refusal to bow to the dictates of the Fourteenth Louis regarding red heels led to his duel with the Chevalier de Grammont in the very courtyard of the palace at Versailles, and his brief retirement to the château?

It was at the command—I use the word advisedly—of his descendant, the Marquise de St. Foire, *née de Lorme*, my maternal grandmother, that my boyhood was spent in France. The little grande dame was secure in the belief that a woman who at the fall of the Second Empire had held the palace door and defied the populace while gaining time for the escape of her adored Empress, Eugénie, could with small effort eradicate democracy from the heart of a lad from that abomination, a sister republic.

From her, my overwhelming love for

France. But the gallant little lady did not know Gilbert and Sullivan, and failed to realize that, like Strephon, while my head and shoulders might be stanch conservatives, my heels remained a pair of hopeless radicals. France is treasured in memory—liberated France, but the watchword of my heart is “America.”

Much digression, Mrs. Bevington, while my thanks remain unspoken. I know I am but one of many to profit by your generosity, and it is possible that ere now you have forgotten the episode. It was good of you to remember even for a moment a lonely, ailing man.

Also, it was beautiful of you to give kind words and wood-grown jewels to the woman of the street car. At first I confess I resented her presence, but now I find myself wondering, is there any other woman who would have done just as you did? Who shall say what it meant to the hard-faced, bedizened being,

to hear the gentle voice, and feel the touch of so beneficent a spirit?

Your escort must have felt immensely proud of you, even though, had you consulted him, he would have advised against your action. No man, and, I imagine, few women, could lay claim to so tender courage. Miss Pratt, for instance, is a woman of great independence of opinion and kind intent, yet my psychological knowledge tells me it would be as natural as breathing for her to withdraw her very consciousness from the zone inhabited by such a woman.

What will she do with the garland you gave her, and, dear Mrs. Bevington, what must I? Should one place it in water? I hope you will tell me no. I am very ignorant, but no one before ever honored me with such a gift.

Will you think me unappreciative if I tell you that I have kept the little box with its vivid sprays in the drawer of my private desk?

You see, I was alone when my man de-

livered it, and before I had recovered from the surprise and pleasure of it, I heard Miss Pratt approaching, so I slipped it into the drawer. Will you understand that I don't quite know how to bring it out?

Neither am I sure that I want to share it—a sick man's fancy, if you will. Of course Miss Pratt could tell me exactly what should be done with it, but—well—it still looks as vivid as the moment it arrived, and after all, it's mine and not Miss Pratt's.

Miss Pratt's sense of exact justice is keen, and of course there is no possible objection to her giving her leisure hours to Dr. Perkins, nor is there any reason why either of them should worry over the forlorn state of a house-bound and probably undesirable companion.

What is it like, Mrs. Bevington, to wander at will? What does it mean to the man who is privileged to accompany you? I wonder—though I must express surprise that a Middle

Westerner can take time from the rush of the business procession to follow the sylvan path.

I am afraid this is even more illegible than usual. I think perhaps I am not quite so well. Perkins, with all the assurance of the specialist, says I am worrying and must stop. He is quite wrong, of course. The one thing I have to be thankful for is that I have absolutely no cause for worry. He somewhat irritates me with his reiterations in regard to this point. I certainly know when I am right. Perkins may take my pulse, temperature, et cetera, but so far he has not bored a hole into my brain.

Am I taking "too much for granted" that you will write? No, you told me to send my —that is, you gave me to understand I might write and expect an answer. Let it not be long, dear lady.

May I tell you that the sonata lags—perhaps because I cannot feel its completion to be a matter of much moment.

Miss Pratt still puzzles me; accurate, equable, remote to austerity when here; yet I hear her trip down the stairs and laugh almost buoyantly as she drives away with Dr. Perkins. If she were more like you! But then she would not stay here. The world's aglee, Mrs. Bevington, and I am

Yours gratefully and sincerely,

M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., October, 1913.

Helen, your letter was like a bit of your own self and the dear life at home—I may as well confess it, child, I'm homesick for you and freedom; I want to shed the bombazine, flee back to Middle West, wear a rose-colored house gown, and do my hair in a silver halo again; I want to walk miles in the country—
Oh, I want my friends.

Now that I've written it out in black and white I shall feel better. You mustn't worry, Helen, I'm all right. If I'm not exactly wildly happy here, I'm interested, and that's half the battle.

The double life is going on with a vengeance. As "Margaret Bevington" I write long letters to Marcus, and he thinks me a saint, while as "Miss Pratt" he looks upon me as an unpleasant but necessary person whom he is often minded to discharge and yet can't make up his mind to, because it would be difficult to replace me.

Added to which, he has grown to like me and doesn't know it.

That's why he is so wroth with me. Truly Helen, he's jealous of Dr. Perkins, in whose automobile I go out every afternoon, while my stern employer sits in self-imposed and bad-tempered loneliness in the library. It's his own fault—he has firmly refused to drive out since we had that little tiff because I

wouldn't play for him, and I can't stay in the house twenty-four hours in the day.

His attitude of wounded displeasure makes it impossible for me to do otherwise than stand on my dignity, and there we are.

No one is more amused over it than Dr. Perkins, whose twinkling blue eyes look on life with a humorous relish, and who tells me that a little wholesome shaking up, temperamentally, won't be in the least bad for his patient. We have good times together. Sometimes he makes the automobile spin like a scarlet streak when we get out on the country roads, and other times we just potter along and yarn.

You see, Helen, he's making a study of me in his capacity of psychologist (though he thinks I don't know it), and for all his science and cleverness he's much puzzled. With him I'm gay and merry, capricious, whimsical, or quiet, as the mood suits me; he's my safety valve, and I wear a scarlet wing on my hat when I go out with him.

On the other hand he sees me with Marcus, always in black unrelieved with any touch of color, no laughter, no moods, just a quiet, cheerful gravity, a very self-contained person indeed. He's putting all sorts of traps to discover the real "I" and it's good fun to circumvent him.

However, he trusts me and thinks I'm good for Marcus, whom he loves very dearly, after the manner in which men care for one another. He has told me about him from time to time, so now I know something of the things that have led to his invalidism and his strange attitude toward people.

He was very brilliant, Dr. Perkins says—one of the foremost consulting surgeons in Boston, despite his youth; a gifted pianist, athletic, fond of sports, and an ardent devotee of the automobile, and he was charming, too, Dr. Perkins says, with a winsomeness about him that made him in demand everywhere.

Then he became engaged to the daughter of

an aristocratic Brookline family—a beautiful girl. The date was fixed for the wedding and this house, which is the old Langtree home-stead, was made ready for her. Dr. Perkins says he has never seen more beautiful devo-tion than Marcus gave to this girl.

Then came the automobile accident which crippled him. He was driving rapidly, to keep an appointment with her, when a child ran out in the road before the machine.

There was only one thing to do, and he did it. The child was unhurt, but the smash-up left him in very grave shape indeed, and the outcome was that the girl broke her engage-ment—said she didn't want to be tied to a man who would probably be an invalid for years. She went abroad with her family and finally married there—somebody in England, I believe.

So Marcus became what he is now—a morbidly introspective, misanthropic, cynical man, despising women, racked by an

exasperated nervous system, and sternly resolved to live on in the scene of his wrecked hopes.

The house is just as he arranged it for her, even the chair in the embrasure and the strange little ottoman beside it. The last was for her—it was one of her pretty ways to sit on a low seat beside him.

Dr. Perkins says that physically he has entirely recovered from the accident and is really quite a well man, could he be made to believe it. The neuritis in his left arm is all that remains, and the doctor declares even that would disappear if only he would go about like other men and have an interest in life. Goodness knows I've done my best to give him one—he has become interested in two women, "Margaret Bevington" and "Martha Pratt" and is in a sad state of mind between 'em.

The knowledge of his story makes me feel very gently toward him—even when he is

most exasperating the maternal spirit stirs in my heart and I want to go over to him and tell him just never to mind, and pat him a bit—that's really what he needs, Helen, only “Martha Pratt,” of course could never do anything so unorthodox.

Dr. Perkins told me of the procession of secretaries that have come and gone. First he had men, but men wouldn't stand his moods, his quiet, cruel scorn. Then necessity drove him to engage women, and I laughed until I nearly gave up the ghost as Dr. Perkins described the motley crew that had trooped up these dignified steps in answer to his advertisement. Frumps and fashionables, grandmotherly old ladies who murdered the king's English, stiff school-ma'ams, nurses in rattling seersucker—every type that he so carefully eliminated from that last advertisement.

It's good to get your letters, and the little printed scrawls from the kiddies, and the nice,

cigar-smelly, jolly ones from Jack. They're all that keep my real self alive in this queer masquerade that I've drifted into—that and the letters I write to Marcus—heavens, Helen, he must never find me out. With all his faults he's the soul of honor and would never forgive a deception. Write me soon and don't worry. Love and love, dear, from,

MARGARET.

Dr. Perkins and I found some bittersweet the other day. I fairly sneaked it into the house and up to my room; I don't know why I didn't want Marcus to see it; and then I sent a bit to him by post—that was the box, the other day. He was so funny about it; hid it away from me, and I never even knew he had received it, until his letter to "Mrs. Bevington" disclosed that he was treasuring it in his private desk drawer, and didn't care to have "Miss Pratt" know about it!
What a mix-up!

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, November, 1913.

“And all the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed and worshiped Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.

“Then the king’s servants, which were in the king’s gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgresseth thou the king’s commandment?

“And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.”

These things be written in the book of Esther, in the third chapter and sundry verses thereof. It is interesting to know that Miss Pratt’s Christian name is Mordecai.

I’m sorry about the sonata; it has been good to think of you as creating a beautiful thing for the world—bringing beauty out of

the void, adding to the world's store of loveliness. To those who bring their offering in music, it seems to me humanity's response is deepest, truest. You will think in music ere long again, I know. You mustn't put your message aside, half spoken, as one of no moment.

What you have written me of France strengthens this web of acquaintance that we are weaving, for I, too, knew and loved her in those golden years of life, when heart and imagination knit themselves so closely into the radiance and glory of a gallant land.

In later years I knew your smiling country of the Marne, with its vineyards rich in grapes, but the intimate and earlier years had to do with Normandy and Paris—Paris and the convent of the Sacred Heart, a strange bit of life for a very young American girl with those stately women of the order. It seems to me now, as I look back, as though in that com-

munity dwelt the reincarnation of the grande dames of the old régime, clad in different vesture, replacing pomp with piety, but in essence unchanged. And then came the years of music in Rouen, and thus back to beloved Normandy.

So I have kinship of the spirit with France through old, unshadowed memories, though, unlike yourself, there are no nearer ties, no dark-eyed French ancestress of little tapping heels and courage swift in rescue of her queen. I imagine the château beneath sheltering trees, the open door disclosing a noble hall, and descending the stairway a small and regal figure in trailing black, with snowy hair piled high.

Do I discern, beyond her, in the shadows, a shy and adoring lad?

Have you planted your bulbs yet? We've made our fall garden, spending all our substance for poet's narcissus, daffodils, snow-

drops, and crocuses, to star the garden when the snow shall melt in the spring.

We made a bonfire of the dead hollyhock stalks and all the cuttings, and the air was filled with the pungent smoke of it; it's always a sad sort of bonfire for me—as though the sweet essence of the summer had been cast into the flames and reduced to ashes. We brought in the dahlia roots and covered with leaves the perennials in the hardy borders, and put the rosebushes into their stiff frocks of straw. Now the garden is all ready for its winter's sleep. Forgive me that I write so long of it, but it has been many things to me, an understanding spirit, a place of peace.

The man of the Middle West—you wrong him. You think him hard of head and crude of manner, and so sometimes he may be; but you don't know that in his heart dwells the eternal child.

I sometimes believe he has found the foun-

tain of youth; and so it is good to go afield with him, he has such a good time without knowing why; he hasn't learned yet to analyze his mental processes in the face of Mother Nature, or to proclaim himself "Greek" because he loves to see the dappled sunshine beneath the trees.

And if, on most days, he marches in that procession of which you speak, still he finds time for kindnesses by the way; he will stop long enough to bare his head before grief, or to give three cheers for brave deeds done.

And though I have been of many lands and have found chivalry in all, yet I think perhaps nowhere is it so fair as in this Middle West. Man's attitude toward woman here is so fine a recognition of her best; it is so frank and so sincere——

Please, my friend, place me on no pedestal, proffer me no halos; neither the position nor the adornment is becoming to me; they don't

belong. If you knew me better, as you know Miss Pratt, for instance, you would find me full of faults, and of the sort you like least.

As I look out of my window I see the first early flakes of snow falling. 'Twill pass, and we shall still have our Indian Summer—and yet—well—good-night.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

P. S.

I don't know what to tell you about the bittersweet; you see, none of its wild, free tribe ever found itself just *there* before. It doesn't need water nor coddling, but it's a stranger to an embarrassed atmosphere, it has never known furtive appreciation nor the darkness of hidden corners.

I am smiling a little that so slight a touch of Nature should have brought you to confusion.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., November, 1913.

DEAR MRS. BEVINGTON:

When your letter came to me I felt as though I were clasping the hand of a friend. I held the unopened envelope, turning it over and scrutinizing it, as I have so often seen women do. I used to wonder why—I'm beginning to know. During those moments of uncertainty I felt less alone than in years. I knew I should find within the sympathetic understanding which I have somehow fallen into the way of expecting these few months past.

What a good letter was yours—but of course you know that, for you are a very wise woman. Just enough tarragon to add zest to the milder ingredients.

So Miss Pratt's name is Mordecai, eh? Let me assure you she doesn't dress the part. I don't believe she possesses in either her

material or spiritual wardrobe one iota of sackcloth or ashes, and verily she mourneth not for her people, but motors daily with Dr. Perkins, apparently enjoying it much.

I shall have to rechristen her; you cannot be Miss Pratt's godmother. I hereby decline to make exit and entrance by the back door, whereas if she remain Mordecai and I use the front gate—well, I seriously object to the unsure footing which was Haman's in his last and highest estate. There is a lack of dignified repose about it which does not appeal.

I don't think Miss Pratt enjoys her position here, but she makes no sign of relinquishing it.

She sits across the room from me as I write, filing documents as though she had been trained by Efficiency himself. It's a strange life for such a woman to choose, and I've found myself wondering of late, who are her people, where her home, has she one? Am

I developing that abomination—curiosity, or have I stifled almost to the point of death my interest in my fellow man?

Your letter tells me of the holocaust of your summer flowers, that your garden is shut away from you in the coldness of its winter sleep, and I've been picturing you as always among the flowers and the great out-o'-door, with no worries to face, no problems to solve.

Yet, if this were the case, I realize for the first time, I never should have known you. I am abashed at my own selfishness; the knowledge of it has lashed me ever since I read your letter, wherein your first thought is to sorrow over the delay in my pettifogging sonata. No, I will not revile it, for has it not brought to me the beautiful echo of your unselfish encouragement.

I was interrupted here. Perkins's motor horn bellowed and Miss Pratt's gone and will be, I suppose, for at least three hours. If it were permissible to use language to a lady,

there are two things I should like to be profane about—Perkins's motor and his "drops." If I must swallow them, why can't they be given a more mature name? Drops!—They grow more bitter every day.

I've re-read your letter and I'm going to speak to my man about the horses, and then I'm going to take out my bittersweet and learn something from the jeweled heart of every blossom of it.

Faithfully yours,

M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., November, 1913.

You ought to be shaken, Helen.

Why did you give Mr. Langtree's silent telephone number to Kirke Wyndham?

Kirke called up this evening, soon after dinner. Through some mistake the call was put on the library telephone. Luckily I

answered it. What if Mr. Langtree or one of the servants had heard Kirke's jolly baritone asking for Mrs. Bevington and calmly insisting that she was here?

At my elbow sat Marcus. I think he was too surprised to do the polite and leave the room.

Kirke knew my voice.

"That you, Margaret?" he sang out, as though we had seen one another yesterday.

The surprise of it swept me off guard.

"Kirke!" I exclaimed. "Oh, but I'm glad!" and glanced across the table to see Mr. Langtree's cold amazement.

I know I was flushed and sparkling. What woman wouldn't be, to hear an old friend's voice after weeks of—well, never mind.

After that it went something like this:

"Margaret, I've come back, just for you. Washington to-night or in the morning. Waiting for instructions. Now I'm caught here at the Copley-Plaza; ran on a member of

the bridge committee and he's corralled me for a conference—for which curse him. Can't get away for more than an hour. After that—couldn't we go to your hanged old symphony for a while, dear, and have a quiet bit of supper afterward? Where are you? I'll send out a machine."

Here was a nice pickle. Kirke mustn't know the house number. He would appear the first chance.

I hedged a bit. Then the solution came.

"I'd love to, Kirke. It isn't symphony night. I've had quite a lot of that. It's nice and self-sacrificing of you to suggest it. What did you say? Oh yes, the Follies by all means—I've been dying to see it. Evening clothes? Don't bother about that. Of course you can't, when you may have to make a train."

"Then it's all right, Margaret. I'll send for you. What's that house number?"

"Send the car to—Oh, Kirke, I have an

idea—I'm sure—" I looked up at Mr. Langtree. Naturally he rose to the occasion.

"Pray have the carriage, Miss Pratt. I will tell James to bring the horses around—at about what time?"

"Thank you so much, Mr. Langtree—in about half an hour, if you will." Then into the telephone, as Mr. Langtree stiffly effaced himself—"I'm going down in the family carriage, Kirke."

"Well, if you like that better, dear. Best pick me up at the hotel if you don't mind."

There wasn't much time to dress. I hurried into the good old faithful—the black point d'esprit which becomes evening dress when I drop my long cloak. A black lace scarf hid my hair, which took to its old ways most becomingly, if I do say it. Then I went off in state, tempting Fate in more ways than one, and trusting luck to get me out of the hole.

Kirke came out from the Copley-Plaza,

handsome, well set up, looking particularly fit in his winter tweeds. He always has been the best dressed man I know, in just the right, careless sort of way—and after Marcus in mole-color and Dr. Perkins in anything he happens to pick up——!

It was mighty good to see Kirke, even if you did land me in the tightest place I've ever known, making me act later on like the heroine of a scarlet detective story or a movie star. Wait till you know the end!

We sat through the Follies and yarned as best we could under the noise of it. He wanted to know why I was in Boston, and what I was doing and why I wasn't with you at Middle West, and all the rest of it.

I was able to put him off—then, but I knew he was only waiting for that quiet hour over supper, when he would lean across the table, put one of those fine, strong brown hands on mine, look me straight in the eye, and say, "Now Margaret, I've got to know."

And while I could handle that situation, how was I to keep him from going home with me? I had a plan—but would it work?

There was a fearful jam when we came out of the theater. I had counted on that, but I had not counted on the astonishing object seen out of the tail of my eye—Marcus Aurelius coming out of the theater with the crowd.

He saw us, of course. Equally of course I did not see him. The next instant Kirke was handing me into a terribly splendid machine and was about to get in himself.

I had to act quickly.

“I’ve left my pet opera glass, Kirke—could we find if it’s been turned in at the box office?”

Kirke started back to the theater, and the chauffeur called after him—“Wait for you farther up the block, sir,” as the long line of cars began pressing up.

It all happened in a second.

We drove on for a bit. I thrust upon the

astonished chauffeur a fat tip and the scribbled note for Kirke that I had been clutching, grabbed the tail of my gown, and slid out of the far door of the car.

"Tell the gentleman I'll call him up at the Copley-Plaza," I said, and then performed the disappearing-lady-act straight into an empty cab.

No doubt the two chauffeurs exchanged a broad wink. I didn't care. I gasped out, "Prides Crossing, drive fast," and huddled into a corner. As we hurled past the theater, I saw Kirke come out.

My cabby must have been used to escaping heroines. He doubled on his tracks through old Boston's crooked streets until no sane driver could have figured out his course, and then plunged off madly for Marble Street.

I reached home ahead of Marcus. He too came in a cab. What next? Marcus in a machine! Marcus at the Follies!

Meanwhile Kirke is evidently on his way to

Washington. I called up the hotel and the clerk said that "the gentleman had checked out at 11.30."

That must mean that he got his instructions and had to hurry away. Otherwise, he would appear on this doorstep in the morning. Do you realize that he can get this house number in two minutes through the telephone office.

What do you suppose he thought? I wouldn't have hurt him for the world. What an undignified situation!

M. B.

Helen Mayberry to Margaret Bevington

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, November, 1913.

DEAR WUZZ:

Your Paddy-whack letter arrived like a bomb, as fast as the special delivery boy could hurl himself over the road, but even then Kirke's million dollar wire beat him out.

Naturally you're mad; anyone would be;

91596

so am I, when I think if that wretched Washington telegram had only missed fire, K— would have had his chance. Of course I'm unethical and can't be trusted. My hair should be scrambled, my best frock snipped to bits, and the rest of me given three months in the guard house. I'd apologize if I honestly could, but being a human and not a heroine I can't even be sorry.

When Kirke blew in and didn't find you I answered his questions with yes, no, black, white, and gray, like a child playing forfeits, until his eyes looked so hurt that I was ready to explode and I just had to give him that number. I wish it was twenty-three.

I forgot about Miss Pratt. Besides, if I had said another word I'd have bubbled over. Lucky for you Jack was away. He'd have blurted out the whole thing. Men can't sidetrack as we do.

I could wail for Kirke, but oh, what a whoop-la situation.

M. A. L. at the Follies in his historic moles; Kirke charging like an auroc after those framed-up opera glasses, and you hipping out of the back door of one machine and pussy-footing it into another, while classic Boston rolled by and didn't know it was the scene of a ten-cent serial. Ye gods!

I gather from Kirke's wire that when he failed to locate Cinderella and the glass coach he rushed into the hotel to 'phone and was held up by the desk clerk with that miserable message ordering him to report at once. He tried to get you from the station to make sure you had reached home safely, only to be informed that your 'phone was ordered silent after 9 P. M. "An hour when all good little girls and boys should be in bed" (Inglesby).

Well, as Aunt Anne would say, the same day that Sue spilt the salt the pigeon house fell down. No one can accuse your comedy of lacking action.

K—— took it for granted that the invalid

you are visiting is a lady—score one on M. A. L. And you must have given him to understand that you were on the wing and just passing through, for he wants your next address. I should like to answer—"Home for the Fly by Nights," but of course I'll get out of it in some usual feminine manner.

Isn't the success of Jack's exhibit wonderful! Everything sold but the Madonna and that he refused to give up. It's magic when you remember that four years ago we landed from France with nothing in the world but Dickie and the canvases.

The public was splendid. Flocked in and bought. Wish you could have seen me being a business woman in my new frock. Received people, led them to it, discoursed learnedly of distances, light effects, and values—especially the latter. And when they were worked up to the desired point, I stepped out and let that clever young Morgan close the deal.

The result is that we're out of debt and

have real money to the good. I can't believe it. Doesn't seem quite artistic.

The press notices would make you rock with joy. I shall have to leave town to change my frock. It seems Jack fell in love with me at first sight because I was some sort of human cornflower, "always wearing blue to match my eyes." Whereas I met him in Jim Ludlow's studio on a wet day, and had on the most disreputable raincoat that ever came out of a ragbag, and a pair of shoes that would have shocked Susan,

Well, my dear, good-by. Write and say you've forgiven me.

Tell me all about you, but nothing about Marcus! Jack says he's the kind of man you might pick out of the Old Ladies' Home.

I'm scared to death you'll find yourself in love with him, he appeals so to the maternal side of you. Besides, I simply won't have my sympathies swung over to him. It wouldn't be loyal to Kirke.

You know what a mixture of humor and pathos does to an audience, and when I picture him following you into that Follies crowd, oh, Lord—what did he say the next day? I shall curl up and die if I don't hear.

It's one unholy muddle, but it is exciting.

Love from us all,

HELEN.

The caveman his lady love grabs,
Enraged by cold friendship in dabs.
But with terror made brave
She breaks out of the cave,
And escapes in a great many cabs.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., December, 1913.

How splendid about the pictures, Helen!
Seventeen sold! I'm so glad, so glad.

Success was sure to come to Jack, but that
it should come so soon, at his first one-man
exhibition, when you are both so young and

can enjoy it, when it will give him heart to go on and on to greater heights, is one of the things Life grants too seldom. And you've helped to open Life's hands, Helen.

God bless you both. Tell Jack what's in my heart. I'll write soon to him. I'm glad he could keep the Madonna. I like to know that it's in the family.

And as for Kirke and that mad night!

I was much too indignant to see any particular fun in it at the time, but next morning I laughed and cried over the absurdity of it. Of course it's all right, child—I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Better set up in business as the goddess of the machine. You certainly do the trick.

And as for Marcus—never a word out of him. He never saw the Follies—not he! Most austere and rather bored when I told him a bit about it at breakfast. Once he almost gave himself away, but he covered neatly and remained remote and superior.

Howsome'er, I did see him take a look at himself in the long hall mirror. Perhaps he didn't enjoy the sight, for he was particularly damn during the morning's work. Then he drove off in the carriage—unheard of thing in the forenoon, and didn't return for lunch. There have now been several of these mysterious expeditions.

Don't let yourself grow panicky over Mr. Langtree. No need whatever. You, Helen, whose marriage has been one of joyous comradeship, can never know how blessed is freedom to one to whom marriage meant chains. To have gone out of the reach of alien hands forever is like the wind that blows over the heath from the sea. I want to keep the breath of it in my nostrils—even though it buffet me.

Besides which, my dear, it might be well to recall that Mr. Langtree has shown no desire for my capitulation, either as Miss Pratt or Mrs. Bevington. He's jealous, I grant, but

from selfishness, not affection. As I wrote him, Miss Pratt is Mordecai in the gate to him.

Jack's wrong, though, about the Old Ladies' Home kind of man. He is in the early forties, and would be very masculine were he not ill. No, and I wouldn't call him a curmudgeon—it's as though everything were awry in his soul since that girl's small hand twisted it into discord.

I'm willing to own to the maternal instinct; sometimes I think the Lord meant me to have it toward men even more strongly than most women do, since He denied me children. Heaven knows men are but children—they don't grow up as we do. I think it was the knowledge of that that made me able to bear the desolate years in the north.

And of course, dear, he knows nothing of those years, nor of any reason why the thought of playing for a stranger should be a bitterness to me, so don't revile him for ask-

ing me. It was quite natural that he should. It must seem strange to him that I should be so selfish. He will never ask me again, I know.

There is no garden here, only a formal stretch of grass, broken by shrubbery and a sun dial, and bordered by fruit trees. I wrote him about making the fall garden at home, and after he received the letter he sent for catalogues and held converse with a florist, who sent a man to plant bulbs in the grass and beneath the trees.

It's late in the season—I heard the man telling him the ground was too hard and cold, that it was more than likely the flowers would never bloom. But the planting's done and we'll see what the spring will bring. And his heart is as frozen as the ground, Helen, and just about as likely to flower.

Don't worry. I'm safe in more senses than one. This little aristocratic backwater of Prides Crossing is a haven.

Some day I expect I shall have had enough of it, and then I'll walk into the arms that are waiting for me.

Good-night.

—
MARGARET.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., December, 1913.

Helen, I am coming Home for Christmas—I can't withstand the dear pleading of your letter, which attunes so perfectly with the urging of my own heart. So I've arranged with Mr. Langtree, who was surprisingly understanding about it, and I leave here the twenty-first, reaching Home the twenty-third, in time to help make Christmas in the cottage.

What dear Christmases we've had there, carrying the holly home in our arms, looking like bits of the Georgia forest escaped to the North, and trimming the living room until one might fancy it a temple of the Druids.

The true spirit of Christmas dwells there, Helen, with you and Jack and the little ones—the generous thought for others, the little kindnesses going forth brightly in gay baskets, the coming and going of friends. It's good to know that I am to be part of it again; it hadn't seemed possible until your last letter came, and then I said, "I *must*—and why not?"

My holiday lasts until January third, so I shall have the New Year with you, too. How we shall yarn, dear, down on the rug before the fire, when we've put the children to bed and packed Jack off after a last cigar. Goodness, Helen, 'twill be good to smell a cigar again. Mr. Langtree never smokes; he used to, but has had an idea that it was bad for his nerves. I fancy a renewed acquaintance with My Lady Nicotine would help in the humanizing process.

For he is coming on—more than a little—has made up his mind that he will no longer

sit in a corner and let Dr. Perkins or any other man outshine him.

New clothes, if you please, and ten years docked off his age, just like that, with the shedding of his "moles." Handsome tweeds, two suits of them, and neckties colorful, not gay; a new hat that has a bit of dash to it, and an impeccable overcoat! This fine raiment explains his morning expeditions. Visits to his tailor.

His sartorial splendor was first sprung on my astonished vision when I found him standing by the fireplace, wearing the brown suit. (It is stunning.) He had an elbow on the mantel, a sort of out-for-victory tilt to his head, and just a spice of deviltry in his eyes. (They're not gray at all! Warm hazel.)

He turned to me as I came down the room, and a smile glided over his face.

"Will you do me the honor of driving with me again? I've missed our drives," he said, and his manner was very courtly.

"With pleasure," I answered, whereupon he reached out his hand with a whimsical lift of his left eyebrow—it was his apology for past curtness and unreasonableness.

I gave him my hand—there was nothing neurasthenic in the way he held it for a second—and the incident was closed.

He had ordered the horses brought round just a trifle before Dr. Perkins's motor car was due.

I came down in my hat with the scarlet wing—what less could I do after he had done *his* possible—and we drove off in the dignified, somewhat festive elegance of the handsome Russian sleigh with a pair of blacks.

The big sleigh, with its nodding plumes and soft, richly lined bear robes, was a new experience to me—it was the first time there had been snow enough to take it out.

The drive was an exhilarating one—quite different from those of former days.

For the first time Mr. Langtree thawed—

his eyes were no longer coldly scornful, but merry—he made a jest or two, and talked entertainingly and well.

Since the ice has been broken we are getting on much more comfortably, though I must confess that I miss the zip of the old antagonism.

Something like an interest in the woman who dwells a stranger in his gates has been awakened in him—not a vulgar curiosity but a bit of human thoughtfulness. I can see a glimmer of the charm which Dr. Perkins told me he had possessed.

We have driven out several times since and the same good atmosphere has prevailed. I don't go with him every day, however, for various feminine reasons which you, dear, will understand. I continue to give a goodly portion of my leisure to Dr. Perkins and the scarlet motor.

We are working again on the sonata—the human note is creeping in there also, giving it

a new kind of beauty. He composes slowly and with infinite thought.

Only a little while until I shall see you all, dear heart—love and love.

MARGARET.

P. S.

I wonder how Mr. Langtree passes his Christmases—I imagine the time a very gloomy one.

We've been twice to the theater—even passed up a chamber music affair for once—what a change of heart!

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, December, 1913.

We are making ready for Christmas with many dear and simple observances to usher in the season. The children have celebrated “Little Christmas” and have written their letters to Santa Claus, posting them at evening in a time-honored hole in an evergreen

tree at the foot of the garden. As they were gone next morning of course it was perfectly clear that Santa had collected his mail at night.

Bless their hearts—their wishes are so human! Dick writes:

“I want the winged horse, the name of him I can’t spell, to ride on to the rainbow. Besides I want a steam engine and track and round house and baseball and please send a prize for Daddy and a all year round rosebush for Mother and an own little boy for Aunt Margaret.”

Jackie, who is only two, drew strange pictures which stood for blocks and a Noah’s Ark, a gingerbread man and much taffy. He’s too little yet to think of others, but Dick knows; he’s such a dear—a real boy, but with a strange little understanding soul. He knows how “Daddy” is working for an award at the Spring Academy, and how Helen, who is “Mother,” must have flowers blooming about her, always.

I try not to go downtown these pre-Christmas days; it hurts to see the cheap and garish wares, the tinselled trimmings, the flaunting Christmas trees, parading as trade marks of "business" in a holy season. So I make my modest purchases early, and weave Christmas thought into making my gifts, in the refuge of the sunny room that overlooks the shrouded garden.

To me Christmas comes best and most truly in the country, out under the stars.

I find myself wondering about your sonata, and wishing I might hear the music of it; I believe that when it is finished you will write even greater music. A symphony to carry a message to hearts that have suffered.

I know that you have this message in your heart, this gift within your hand.

The windows are open, not only that they may admit reviving breezes, but that through them your music may pass out into the world.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., December, 1913.

DEAR MRS. BEVINGTON:

How is it that you always say just the right thing at the right moment? Your letter about Christmas was exactly what was needed, and it's quite natural that Miss Pratt should wish to spend a few days of the season with her friends, who and wherever they may be.

Strange that I should know so little of a woman who has been my constant daily associate for six months. Come to think of it, if anything were to happen—illness or accident, for instance, I shouldn't even know with whom to communicate. It isn't human, and I never thought of it before.

I'd like to lay the blame on her but that I have a feeling that you would not agree with me, yet had you been in her place I should long ago have known all about your friends at

the cottage, et cetera. Oh, for more absolutely straight spoken Margaret Bevingtons!

I wish you and Miss Pratt might meet and know each other. She needs just that something of trustfulness, that quality of whimsical understanding, which you of all women can give. Well, one must not ask everything, and she certainly is a wonderful help in regard to my music, even though she will not play for me.

Yes, I'm going on with the sonata, but your words regarding it make me feel very humble, and at the same time very determined. I want you to at least have no cause to be ashamed of me. But the sonata has a will of its own. The second movement is not at all as I had planned, but it will come only in this different spirit, so I give myself into its hands and go with the tide.

It's really on account of the sonata I was grudging Miss Pratt her few days away. Wretched in me, wasn't it, but I wanted to

finish it. Here I can justly lay the blame—or praise—on you; your letters are inspiration. And it may be possible that I need not pause, even during Miss Pratt's absence, though I can never hope to copy music as she does. Still I shall try and do the best so handicapped a creature may.

Yours in gratitude,

M. A. LANGTREE.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., December, 1913.

Mrs. Bevington, I've had a shock. I presume it's because you are far away that I can mention it even to you, for it has touched my pride, my manhood.

To-night, at dinner, Miss Pratt looked white and fagged, but chatted as though nothing mattered.

Afterward in the library I noticed her

hand at her temple and when she bade me good-night, I followed her to the door and told her I knew she was suffering—asked her to let me ring up Perkins, or at least provide her with some aspirin.

She turned, looked right in my eyes, smiled a strange smile, and said gently, but with peculiar emphasis:

“Please don’t persist in reminding me of what I am trying to ignore. You’re very kind, but I must refuse to believe I’m ill when I know I am not. Good-night.” And she was gone.

I felt her thought. Knew she looked upon me as a subject of imaginary illness.

Now, after hours of argument twixt self and reason, I am shattered by doubt and almost ready to give in.

That a man must admit he has been his own mental jailer, barred himself from life and the right to lighten, perhaps a little, the misery of his fellows; burdened himself with

shackles of self pity! The shame of it. I must know.

Here is my confession. I cannot talk to Perkins about it.

I have sent for the latest book on nerves—
Good God!

M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, December, 1913.

It was a brave confession. Not all of us can look a hateful thing in the eye, recognize it and give battle to something we've been hugging close and cherishing.

Miss Pratt knew your mettle and dared; I'm proud of her.

And of you—and glad for you. Now you will heal yourself. I know—for I too have been through the dark waters—and learned that the only salvation lies in one's own will—

save for the help that comes from the hand of a friend.

Let me help—come whenever you need me—for there will be times—

A day is coming when you will give thanks that this has happened. I truly believe that everyone needs some smashing blow, to have to fight our way up and out.

We gain a wider vision of the world. It's like a key that unlocks the door of understanding, making us know the inner meaning of pain and pleasure—seeing good and evil—not separated as the poles, but strangely entwined—not so different, sometimes, in complexion.

We learn not to judge; it's all summed up in one word, Brotherhood, a new kinship that makes the world over.

And so you will come into your own—a fair heritage that awaits you and all who have courage.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., December, 1913.

My friend. What should I have done without your letter, filled with its mixture of balm and strength. It has been my life line. The book came. I have wrestled with it, and with myself, all night. I tried to tell it it lied. I knew it did not. I cannot tell you how many times the waters of humiliation and despair closed over my head. But your letter was beside me and I read and re-read it until I can almost repeat it by heart—I knew I *would* not sink, with your voice calling me upward.

God bless you, Margaret Bevington—would that I might kiss the hem of your raiment. And you too have suffered this Hell, but you came forth with courage and tender understanding where I grasped nothing but bitterness. How I wish you were here—I want to hear your voice, to see your face, to touch

your hand; I try to vision you, but I am so unsure.

You say, "There will be times—" but I mean to try and make them as few as possible and not to talk of myself after this, but it has been such an awakening, it has brought such anguish and such hope, that for the once I must let go. When a man must talk of the inner and sacred things—he seeks a woman as his confessor and comforter—you are my woman.

Miss Pratt was brave, and I thank her, but without you she would have been as seed without sunshine. And I'm glad she's to be gone awhile; I prefer to be alone during the reconstruction period. She would never even look a question—but—well—you understand.

When I came to a passage in the book which says: "One of the most pronounced symptoms is that the victim invariably considers his case an exceptional one," I wanted to get up and fight Perkins, good old Perkins,

who knew that when he mentioned neurasthenia it was as a dart in the arena.

When I remember the scathing, self-centered rebukes administered whenever he approached the subject of mental effort in connection with sick nerves, I have some vague idea of what he must have put up with all these years, and never once showed impatience or disgust. Why is it that one can bear with fortitude the announcement of a broken leg, but never a whisper of shattered nerves or a dislocated soul?

I believe I can sleep now, but I had to say good-night—no, good-morning (how much sweeter).

The sun is rising. I look upon that as a good omen. Write soon and help me rearrange my house.

God bless you.

M. A. LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS.,
Christmas, at Night.

Christmas day, Helen dear, and I not with you. I may as well confess that it's been all I could do to be a soldier.

It's well that I didn't start the 23d, as I would have done had not Mr. Langtree and Dr. Perkins each put down a determined foot when the storm began to rage over the middle west, for I should have been blizzard-bound some place between Boston and home. With all trains stalled in drifts, and telegraph wires down, I've no means of sending you word that I am safe at 13 Marble Street.

It's now late night, after a long, strange day, and I wish for you, Helen, with all my heart. Greater troubles have been far easier to be brave under than the disappointment of not being with you now.

Christmas day has brought one great

pleasure to me, dear. Mr. Langtree has had a piano placed in my room; *you* know what that means to me. With the new insight which seems to have come to him of late, I think he in some sort understands that there is a reason why I cannot play for people, and he knows how I love music. It was all done in the quietest way; I believe it was his intention to have the piano brought in while I was with you, but when the blizzard prevented me from going, he maneuvered very skillfully to stay at home yesterday afternoon, insisting that I go out with Dr. Perkins, and when I returned the piano was there, a beautiful instrument, with a particularly rich and lovely tone. I was very much moved by his great thoughtfulness, and had but few words to thank him, but he seemed to understand.

This morning I went to service in a little mission church in Beverly, about which I have much to tell you when I come home.

Mr. Langtree wanted me to have the horses, but one couldn't drive up in splendor to that little church, so I declined.

At dinner he asked me where I had gone to service, and so I told him of this little mission of St. Jude's, an offshoot from the rich and fashionable church of St. Luke's, built up through the work and sacrifice of a young clergyman.

I told him of the little building of dark wood, so beautiful in its proportions, upon which you come suddenly in the midst of workingmen's cottages, all alike in a dismal street; the gate which the heavy snow had turned into sculptured marble; the bark-covered bell tower in the churchyard; the dim beauty of the interior, all dark and polished wood, with the gleam of candles and altar silver.

I told him how the people themselves had builded the church, the workingmen of the factories giving their evening hours to the

polishing of the wood, to the erection of the bell tower, the building of the churchyard wall and gate; of how the women had earned money in simple ways to buy the softly tinted glass for the windows, and of how the altar had been the gift of the little children and the young boys and girls, who had brought their offerings in tiny sums, each one a self denial; of how young and old had worked together in comradeship for the little church which they had wrought out of the stuff of their own labor and sacrifice, and in so doing had themselves become knitted together in a bond of brotherhood.

When I had finished, Mr. Langtree looked up with a new expression which I see often now in his eyes, and said:

“It makes me think of the description Manson gives of his church, in *The Servant in the House*. Do you remember—the most beautiful bit in the play. And the clergyman of this unusual parish—what of him?”

So I told him of John Trevor, "Father" Trevor, his people call him—young, great of soul, with the splendid bigness of his body forever crippled by an accident, who had fought the odds of poverty, earning every penny for his education and a few years ago placed by the bishop in charge of this struggling mission.

I told him, too, how Father Trevor lives alone in rooms near the church, caring for them himself, and bearing on his broad shoulders and in his big heart the burdens of his people.

It was through Dr. Perkins that I found the mission, and though I am not a woman of creeds and dogmas, comfort and peace come to me within a church whereon the hand of the Lord has been placed.

God bless you, Helen, and all the dear ones.

MARGARET.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., Dec. 25, 1913.

The day is done, the silent night wears on, and my thoughts drift across the snowbound world to you, at home, surrounded by loved and loving. I am wondering what *your* day has been, and at the same time trying to possess my soul in patience at the thought that the storm will hold back your wished-for letter. Your letters mean so much to me.

Your last but one gave me an altogether different vision of the spirit of Christmas.

For years the words meant little but an excuse for the bestowal of dollars. It has been just that with me, and then only in regard to my servants and employes.

You made me want to "put Christmas thought" into my all too few remembrances, but alas, my efforts were futile, and, I must admit, absurd.

My visit to a Boston drygoods store, in

search of "just the thing" for Mrs. Allen, my faithful housekeeper, would, I think, have caused you much amusement; my inglorious retreat proved to me that it was no good; I had forgotten.

So I had to make my usual offering of vulgar pence. I felt like apologizing through Barkins, who is proxy for me, but I knew that with true British propriety he would have said, "Yes, sir, just as you say sir; thank you sir."

It's been a wonderful day, quiet, but startling in revelation. First came the "little miracle" of the breakfast table. I entered the dining room to find Miss Pratt, who, by the way, was unable to leave on account of the blizzard—arranging the flowers I had ordered sent her—flowers are always permissible, are they not? But I felt vexed that the man had sent pink roses when I distinctly ordered white. Miss Pratt is austere in her taste. However, she looked up, uttered a

word or so of thanks, smiled the good understanding smile that has come to her of late, held out her hand, and wished me, "A Happy Christmas." If anyone had offered that salutation a year ago—but—well, I was able to return it.

I noticed that about the room were bits of holly and could see, across, in the library, a particularly beautiful spray over the picture of the little *Grandmere* of France. I wanted to say something, but couldn't quite find the words, so I sat down opposite the coffee urn, to find I could not see Miss Pratt. No, she hadn't left the room; she was hidden behind a veritable pyramid of white paper parcels; gifts, of course, but how did they get here. Hadn't her friends expected her to be with them? The enigma was soon solved.

She sped my first cup of coffee to me, looked around the pyramid, and said, "You'll excuse me if I open some of them, won't you? I just can't wait. It's so dear of them when

one thinks how short a time I've been here." I wondered.

As she rapidly opened the parcels, with exclamations of surprise and pleasure, I found myself growing interested. Why didn't she open the oblong one to the left? She did, and at the same time a slim one alongside, and out came two rose-colored enclosures; one of them plainly a pair of small bedroom slippers; poor woman, was she to be martyred in pink?

She arose to the occasion like a Trojan, flashed a smile at the embarrassed maid who "waited," and said, "Oh, Anna, thank you so much. What darling slippers, and she patted, actually patted, those rose-colored knit affairs as though she meant it.

Anna's reply was even more surprising. "So glad you like 'em, Miss. Mrs. Allen fixed on the pink, so I made the pin cushion the same shade as she made the slippers."

I was bewildered, the more so when Miss

Pratt announced that I was an ungrateful man and directed me to open my own presents. And there they were, the wrappings held together with odd little stamps with jolly St. Nick shouting "A Happy Christmas" at me. Three of them, one large, one small, and beside me, rising from the floor, a tall, slender one. Could anyone have sent me a growing plant!

"Open them," cried Miss Pratt.

I did, beginning with the little one, and removing the perfect sprig of holly I recognized Miss Pratt's neat handwriting. She gave me the compliments of the season and a very beautifully wrought letter-opener. Cunning woman!

Then came the large parcel, addressed in Perkins's good old medical scrawl, prescribing all luck and many good years, and containing a humidor and a hundred cigars of what used to be my pet brand. Cigars! From Perkins!

What next? I tore the cover from the "growing plant," to find a smoking stand and outfit, with good wishes from members of my household, beginning with Mrs. Allen and ending with the stable lad, whose name I hadn't even known.

I buried my nose in those cigars, and I am frank to say it's the supreme aroma. I wanted to start right then. I began to wonder if Miss Pratt objected to smoke, when I heard her rippling laugh, and looked up to find her enjoying the situation immensely. I think if she would only discard that rigid dress and do something with her hair, she'd be beautiful.

She refused to allow me to send my thanks, and made me go with her to Mrs. Allen's sitting room, where the servants were exchanging gifts. I think I should have felt decidedly *de trop*, but there was no time, for after a general cry of "Merry Christmas," and "Thank you, sir," I was forgotten, and

they turned to Miss Pratt, from Mrs. Allen to the tiny granddaughter of Thompson, my coachman.

There was a wonderful mingling of respect and affection in their attitude toward her, and I had supposed she knew as little, indeed, less, of them, than I. Yet she had known just what each needed, and they seemed to know the real woman whom I had not solved, and whatever they knew they loved.

Later she went to church. Sometime I will tell you of the little mission she has discovered. We dined early and quietly, and in the afternoon Miss Pratt went to her own rooms, while I sat here and read. How I wished she would play for me, but I can never ask her again! I feel that it is not perversity but some association, that makes it impossible for her to express herself in music while an outsider listens. The wider vision, the understanding—your gift to me—makes me to know this.

Evening fell, and with the starlight came the great miracle.

We were in the library. Miss Pratt opened the humidor, took out a cigar, handed it to me, and smiled a friendly challenge. I clipped it, lighted it by the spirit lamp of the smoking stand, and took one whiff. If there be anything better in Paradise than that whiff, my surprise will be great.

Miss Pratt is a luring listener.

Unconsciously I found myself recalling the keeping of Noel in the old château days, when, cosily wrapped, I followed the tapping heels of the little fur-clad *grandmere*, dispensing to her retainers the warm clothing and choice fare borne in ample hampers by powdered Jean and Henri, her servants of the old régime, unbending as their mistress, save in each peasant's hut, where in some corner set apart, upon his bed of glistening straw, lit by the halo of the blessed candle, lay the image of the Holy Child. No cot too

poor for this bit of adoration, no head too proud to bow in gentleness and silent awe.

So we talked, quietly, lazily—few words and long pauses, those wonderful silences that prove friendship.

During one of these I heard a rustling sound on the driveway. Was the storm sweeping back our way? I hoped not, still the wind seemed to sweep the walk briskly. The door opened and Mrs. Allen, in her best black silk, and Miss Pratt's Christmas shawl, stood looking at us.

"If you please, sir, they want Miss Pratt to draw the curtain. They thought she'd gone away over Christmas until she went to church this morning, and they want to see her. The minister says there's not one of them she hasn't done some good for."

Miss Pratt's face lit up with understanding. She walked silently to the window, drew back the curtain, and threw wide the sashes. There against the blackness of the perfect

night stood fifty men and boys, white cottas covering their coats, every face turned toward the woman in the window. From their midst stepped a man, their pastor, somewhat lame.

"The boys couldn't go home without wishing you a happy Christmas, Miss Pratt," he said, "and I want to add, 'God bless you.' Now boys—ready—"

There was the gentle vibration of a tuning fork, and then floated out on the night air carol after carol, beginning with *Come All Ye Faithful*, passing on to *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*, and *Holy Night*, and ending as they faded away amid the darkness of the shrubbery, with a wonderfully solemn and simple harmony, in which a baritone voice of depth and quality sang, "Oh rest in the Lord, and He will give thee thy heart's desire." Farther and farther away, yet distinct and soft, "He will give thee, will give thee thy heart's desire."

The window closed. I did not look at Miss Pratt. I felt the tears in her eyes, as I felt the impossibility of speech from my own knotted throat. Then she went silently away.

Mrs. Allen came in softly and drew the curtains. She stood a moment as though seeking words, and then——

“It was beautiful, sir, wasn’t it? But the Lord love us, which of us knows what our heart’s desire is? And would any of us know what to do with it if we got it?”

And I’m pondering her homely philosophy. Have I progressed, my patron saint, or do I only think it? And, too, how shall one know one’s heart’s desire?

Good Christmas-night to you.

Faithfully yours,

M. A. L.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., January, 1913.

Helen, dear child, such heaps of precious, thoughtful things from you all in my Christmas box, and best of all, your letter. I'm glad you are to have a bit of a gay, good time in the south, with the pretty duds that are dear to your vain, adorable, unselfish self; you deserve it, and I'm trying hard to make myself not worry about Dick, though a tight feeling comes about my heart when I think of him as less well than usual. He's very precious to me, Helen; he has lived in my heart ever since I first held him in my arms.

Bless him, he knew what he was about when he sent the gray knitted doll. I remember so well the day you first put Jackie into his little knitted suit and cap, like a wee gray brownie, and how I said involuntarily—“Oh, I want a little gray knitted boy.”

Dick looked up at me with those under-

standing eyes of his and tucked his little square fist into my hand comfortingly. "Miss Pratt" isn't a bit ashamed of having a dolly; it sleeps near her and helps to make her feel less far away from Home and Friends.

The rose colored negligee was an inspiration, Helen—the color is lovely. I wear it in the secrecy of my own rooms when the little ceremony of the bedroom candle is over and I've said good-night to Mr. Langtree. The night it came I piled my hair high, draped myself in the rosy gown, and felt my own self again. I've wondered so often if a bombazine mind would be a consequence of the bombazine garb, a fit punishment for my masquerade!

How could I have done it? What desperate spirit must have possessed me, in my quest for work, to make me enter the house of an honorable gentleman, under false pretenses, and add to the iniquity by carrying

on a correspondence of friendship with him? He trusts me so, both as Margaret Bevington and Miss Pratt, makes me very proud of his faith and steeped in shame because of my falsehood! I've no right to his faith; the situation is intolerable. I don't know how to end it, for I don't want to run away—it wouldn't be the first time in my life!

Meanwhile, the problem may solve itself. Mr. Langtree's health is much better; he has come to the point of asserting his authority over his weaker self, and I foresee that he will not long be a neurasthenic invalid to whom "Miss Pratts" are necessary. There's good stuff in him—an indomitable will, now re-awakened, a clear, logical mind, as merciless to himself as to others, very just, and pitilessly honorable. It may be that I can stay it out until he no longer needs me, and then I can depart with dignity.

This was to have been my little green gate into the forest. Well, I went through it into

a pathway of falsehood. What will be the next adventure, I wonder?

At any rate, not Kirke. Oh, yes, I see your point of view, dear, but I'm sick of lies, and to marry a man I don't love would be the greatest one possible.

Kirke's all right—yes—and a dear, but I wasn't born to sail smooth seas.

I've written. He understands now. No need to break our hearts over Kirke, Helen. With his buoyancy and his big work his happiness will come. So we won't talk about it, please, any more.

I'll send this to Jack to forward. You didn't tell me what hotel, and there are others in Palm Beach besides the Royal Poinciana.

Bless you for all your thoughtfulness. Love and love to all.

MARGARET.

I'm writing little own letters to Dick and Jackie.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, January, 1914.

DEAR SOUL:

We have won. Your hand has freed me as surely as ever a prisoner was released from bondage. Some day I will tell you how it was a woman's hand that helped rivet the chain, but not now. There must be re-adjustment of thought there, too.

She was young and had a right to look for happiness. All women have become sacred in the light of Margaret Bevington.

How I fretted at the storm that held back your letter. Before this you will have mine and know that your wish for me came to pass, and that it was a "good" morning. How like you to take time from your friends to speed a word to me. I needed it. Yes, I'm awake now, but I shall always need your word—your friendship.

But what of you? It has always been *my*

problem, *my* despondencies, of which we talked, while you, like a gallant barque, have carried the strain of the hawser which dragged my ship from the rocks of despair and brought it safely into harbor.

I know nothing of your previous voyages, fair or stormy, nothing but your name and your dearness.

I do not ask that you acquit me as a "curiosity seeker"—I trust you too greatly. I ask you to tell me something of the "you" who at times must leave the protecting garden and tread life's stony places; the "you" who wrote in regard to that exacting advertisement, and yet sent me words which were a tonic to a sick soul.

Tell me of you.

Faithfully,

M. A. L.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, January, 1914.

Thank you, my friend, for your letter.
The distance grew less as I read.

You ask me to tell you of myself—and I would, but how? How tell of the story of years that were full and years that were lean; of many parts played, often to weariness; of journeys taken that reached no goal; of a mirage that beckoned and was followed, and an eternal silence that fell; of weariness that claimed for a space, and hands that let go their holding; of strength and work that came, in time, together, bringing their own blessedness; and always, along the way, some gladness; always a way that opened for the feet, and always, always, friends. Ah, the good friends—the gold that Life draws from the crucible of sorrow—how well worth are they whatever of suffering makes them manifest.

And so that is all the story—and it is good of you to care. Please be sure that it is well with me now; I am dwelling in the house of a friend. Sometime I will write you of Helen, and of the protecting love in which she would enfold me, and of the dear childlikeness and the understanding heart of her, but not to-night.

All day and all evening the snow has fallen—it is piled high in drifts and on the level. As I look out the falling flakes glisten like diamonds in the light of the street lamps. Once I loved it—perhaps in time I shall love it again, but there is comfort in the thought of how deep it lies in the frozen north, and how it whitens into purity whatever it falls upon.

This is all of myself, but you will forgive me.
Good night.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., January, 1914.

DEAR MRS. BEVINGTON:

As I read your story, from somewhere came a voice, "Put off thy shoes from thy feet," and of a surety I knew I stood upon holy ground.

How large, how like you, not to resent my wanting to know. How more than wonderful the simplicity of the telling.

The courage of you to again grasp the raveled threads and re-unite them into the "dear must," after the hands had been broken from their holding.

All this, while I have been imagining you a Sans Gène, when in truth you had but mastered the fashion of the smiling face.

And delicately attuned women bear their scars thus, no hardness of heart, no bitterness of soul. Friends! Who would not covet the title—a friend of Margaret Bevington's.

And you speak to me as one. I am very proud. I shall try, believe me, but I shall grope, I shall stumble, I shall lean many times on your generous arm.

It is snowing here also, not, however, so prodigally as with you, but we shall get our share in time. Meanwhile, may every furrow of the North be closed and sealed forever. May no misguided sunbeam unlock a crevice or release a single memory that you would not welcome.

Faithfully your friend,
M. A. LANGTREE.

Mark Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., January, 1914.

MY DEAR:

I write because you want to hear, but more because I must.—The new me is yours, but scraps of the old ego remain and I'm a bit heady to-day.

The world is so different or is it I? Of course I have not had time to sound afar; also I suppose it will be a slow process to get back; I have shut myself away for so long that all but a very few have given me up as hopeless. The advance must come from me. It won't be easy, but I'll not disgrace you. I'll make it.

Good old Perkins has proven himself a diplomat of the first water. Sat here and smoked one of his own cigars as though there had never been a break in that bond of fellowship, the communion of smokers, and spoke as a matter of course as to the desire of certain patients for my opinion in consultation; did I ever tell you that surgery was my profession—and it's the only subject I have never allowed myself to grow rusty upon. I give you my word that when he began to recount the diagnoses I felt like a race horse at the first sniff of the tanbark.

I might remark that the drops were

dropped for good and all with the coming of Christmas.

Of course I shall take the cases, and have been going into them with a will. Miss Pratt here, as in all things, is invaluable.

I am truly concerned about her. She is not the Miss Pratt of Christmas Day. That lady floated away on the strains of the final carol. She's gentle, quiet, unremitting in helpfulness, but she spends her leisure time alone, or over at the mission. She does not care to drive.

I believe in my heart she's tired, but she won't admit it, and when I suggested that she visit her friends, now that the roads are clear, she said that the friends have gone south, and also that she needs no rest.

But she does not laugh any more, not even with Perkins, who is as much puzzled as I am. He doesn't think her ill.

I am wondering if she is weary of me and is trying in her own quiet way to let me know

it. God knows I shouldn't blame her, for I've been a trial.

Yesterday she said I should not need a secretary-companion very much longer, and spoke of an office and assistants.

What should you make of it, and what can I do to let her understand how necessary she is to me?

I cannot keep her against her will, but last night as I watched her light the candles, I realized that she had transformed a stark house into the seeming of that beautiful thing called home.

I don't know just what it is, but as she lights the room she seems set apart; she doesn't glide or float, as people do in books; she drifts, as does the fragrant cloud from the incense brazier, from sconce to sconce, without sound, just a gentle ministering grace, a growing radiance, as must have come the first dawn.

Then she read to me in her beautifully

modulated voice, rest in its every cadence, and it seemed that I must tell her how much I need her. I did not. I shall wait until I hear from you. You have never helped me about Miss Pratt, but in this case I need your advice so much.

Faithfully,

MARK LANGTREE.

Letter from Jack Mayberry to Margaret Bevington

FINE ARTS BUILDING,
MIDDLE WEST, January, 1914.

DEAR MARGARET,

I express to you to-day the chief adornment of my high altar—your picture, the *Madonna*. I want you to understand how darned heroic I am, for in my humble opinion it's the best thing I've done.

But since Helen and the kids are going south I shall be so confoundedly lonesome

that I mean to perform my devotions in the Lady Chapel—my dressing room, where stands the picture of my fluffy-headed missis and the two boys.

Their having to go has given me a jolt. In the distance it was all right. I was so sure that between my work and knowing that they must get out of this climate for a bit I shouldn't have time for any forlorns. I was the chap in the Arabic proverb, "Who knows not and knows not that he knows not"—a fool.

But now the time is at hand it's a different proposition altogether.

I suppose I shall hang around like a love-sick swain, and if the mailman ever fails me I'll run off with Mary Ludlow's cook and plant her in a villa on the bank of the Mediterranean.

I understand now why, when a fellow's wife deliberately deserts him for so many months each year, hell and Tommy get busy

and our divorce courts are done out of the rest they so badly need.

The Luds are trumps. I am to eat by their house and sleep by the cottage. And they'll let me alone.

It's little work these days, yet I can't get away. My portraits depend so much on the mood of my subjects.

The hall table is snowed under with invitations, but nix for yours truly. I mean just to grub around and commune with myself.

Hence my votive offering. I can at least be myself, while you, the most individual being I've ever known, are playing hob with your personality. So I send you "You," body and soul—yes, I got the latter too, and I know it. Hang it where you can see it at the first and last of the day, for I wouldn't have your head or your heart changed for all the dukes of Marble Street the gods could invent, working overtime and Sundays.

Isn't this a screed! But I dare you, yes,

double dare you, to show His Nibs the picture and stand by in your "blacks" while he views it!

Bully for you. Helen says you've worked the transformation and got him into human duds. He sounds like a regular fellow. How in Tophet did you manage?

I wired the florist for the biggest and best bunch, et cetera.

I wish you'd come back and run me and the shack for a bit. The Boston orphan isn't the only one.

Meanwhile, send a line to a disconsolate husband and father.

JACK.

Mole pants and tail coat of good heft,
She caused him to shed right and left;
He's left like a kewpie—
I trust he's not croupy—
My hat! But he must feel bereft.

*Letter from Mark Langtree to Margaret
Bevington*

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., January, 1914.

MY DEAR:

An uncanny thing has happened. A patient interrupted me and I put this letter aside. He stayed until the dressing bell rang, and I hurried upstairs, when, as I passed Miss Pratt's sitting room, she asked if I would like to look at her new picture. It's the first time I have been in her room since she came. The whole atmosphere of the place was different.

Just now I can only tell you of the picture, surely a masterpiece.

The background a tangle of flowers. In the foreground a baby stretching his hand for a blossom held toward him by the central figure, a woman in a rose robe, with delicate lace at throat and sleeves, both open to reveal the beautiful line of her neck and shoul-

der and the marvelous expression of her flexible hands and wrists; a woman with an irregular halo of glistening silvery hair, with eyes tender as violets and bright as stars, and a mouth where sadness and whimsicality fight for supremacy.

Composition and execution masterly, but the thing that drew and held was the woman's face, the most haunting ever seen. The name of the picture is the Madonna of the Roses. It might have been the Madonna of the World. To look into her eyes is like going home.

I gazed so long that Miss Pratt must have grown tired, for I was brought to myself by her asking very quietly if I liked it. Like it! One does not *like* the Sistine, the Bay of Naples, or the God-given glory of a summer morning; one humbly gives thanks that one is permitted to look upon them.

I wanted to talk about the picture, but she turned toward the window—Miss Pratt is

never so attractive in profile, and her black dress and white collar looked more than usually rigid in contrast with the glorious femininity of the woman in the picture.

She said the artist was a friend of hers, and I recognized the signature, "Mayberry," as that of a young Middle Westerner of whom the critics say great things. Miss Pratt seemed to give all her admiration to the setting, the lights, and the baby, none to the woman. I asked if she knew her. She said yes, very well. I tried to get her to talk of her, but she would not. I almost felt aversion in her attitude. She did not volunteer the woman's name, and I could not ask. But something in me gave thanks when she led me to understand that she is neither the artist's wife nor the mother of the child. I don't know why, but I didn't want her to be. Or I do know why and may as well be honest about it.

Everything about the woman of the pic-

ture seemed to be the materialization of my efforts to visualize you. You have never mentioned the name of your friends, but you did say the man was an artist, and you have told me of the little folk.

Has he painted you? Are you the Madonna of the Roses? I can't ask Miss Pratt, but I believe I'm right, and perhaps that's why you will never give me advice *re* my secretary. I don't understand women's ways —it may be you're not good friends. If so, it's because you do not truly know each other. And I'm going to think of you as the wonderful woman of the picture until you tell me not to.

Write soon, dear Madonna *mea*.

Faithfully,

M. A. L.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, January, 1914.

I am feeling very rich with my letters—you put so much into your offering—your man's courage—man's will, your hope. I am not a woman of ready tears, but they brimmed my eyes when I finished your letter of Christmas night; the story of your day was so beautiful.

I am so glad for the new day that has come to you with the New Year; glad that you are going forth again as a strong man to the race. You will win; defeat never yet came to a man who had willed that he reach the goal. But don't be over-zealous, lest this new flame of the spirit prove too ardent for the body—let me put a restraining hand upon your arm; remember that after all you are not quite strong, and be careful—for the sake of your friends. How they will rally to you when they know you want them.

I am looking at your letter, where you tell me my hand has released you from bondage. Bless you for the words; but I don't deserve them; I don't deserve any part of the homage you are giving me; some day I may tell you why.

If any hand has loosed the bonds—Oh, don't you see that it was Miss Pratt's? It was Miss Pratt who spoke the words of illumination, Miss Pratt who has been daily by your side; it was Miss Pratt who brought Christmas to you. Shall I confess that sometimes I grow jealous of Miss Pratt, of the knowledge that she can help you more than I, she's so near you.

Forgive me for so childish and selfish a plaint; if Miss Pratt helps you, I am glad you have her.

I wonder if you can keep her; from what you tell me I believe she will go away. Why? Oh, only a woman's intuition, just a "because." You ask me if I know her. Miss

Pratt is a stranger to me—did I not tell you she is as much a surprise to me as to you? I wish I might help you here—but how? How read another's mind when one does not know one's own? Best focus your logic on the question. Perhaps you will untie the Gordian knot.

It's interesting to know that the Mayberry picture is in your house. You speak of it with a reverent admiration that is very beautiful. Have you forgotten that it came from this despised Middle West?

Your question as to myself touches me variously; I have seen the picture, it was exhibited here in the fall. That you should imagine for me a guise so lovely is very sweet—but that you *do* is hurtful to my woman's vanity, for it shows that you have forgotten the picture I sent you—in my first letter. How slight the impression, how easily effaced, that you should dream of me as the Madonna of the Roses.

Never mind; I'm only smiling a bit to think how, could you see me beside the picture this moment, even as you saw Miss Pratt—your question would answer itself.

I feel very lonely just now—the wind is rising—the fire has died down in the grate. I—I wish you were not so far away.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., February.

DEAR SOUL:

I was tired until I found your letter awaiting me on my return from the hospital, but fatigue fled before the Middle West post-mark. It was hard not to tear the envelope away, but I used the letter opener.

And now, what is it, dear? This indescribable note that has never sounded in any of your letters before. It is your final words that trouble me most, though there are other

things also. Of what are the friends thinking that they let loneliness enfold the radiant spirit of Margaret Bevington. I am not "far away"—my soul goes out to you as you sit by the dying fire, and were it not that one of the cases I have accepted demands immediate attention and I must see it through, I would start this night for Middle West, now my Carcassonne.

You and I must stand face to face. Only the need of my patient holds me, but I know in my heart it cannot long. Something is wrong with you; I know it. A fig for logic when it comes to the intricacies of a human soul.

And you are not the Madonna of the Roses? Well, I suppose it was ridiculous of me to endow Middle West with just one artist, but, however, I mean to believe that the soul looking out from those great gray eyes is akin. So until I do see you, the Rose Mother is Margaret Bevington to me.

It was unspeakable of me to send back the picture and the clippings in the way I did. Won't you believe that it was not really I but a morbid ingrate who revolted at the idea of a woman allowing her picture to be printed, and resented the written word saying how much she meant to so many? You are not alone in your jealousy; I am jealous of all these people who have known you, basked in the sunshine of you for so long;

Yes, I mark what you say of Miss Pratt. She has proven her nobility, and I am grateful, but she is remote, and, having performed her share in an "experiment in human nature," she has retired into her shell and will not be coaxed forth.

Also, she's not generous; she has no "free days" in connection with her art gallery, the which I much resent, for she has forced subterfuge upon me, in my desire to look upon the picture.

She has not so far spoken of leaving me, and

I pray she will not, but I wish I could hit on the right thing to bring a smile to her kind heart. Believe me, I do try and render unto Cæsar, but, to change my metaphor, while there be not six Richmonds in the field, there's one who more than equals half a dozen.

No, dear one, you are my guiding star, and I have to follow your light very closely, for Perkins has grown fussy; like the rest of us, he's a contradiction, *he* seemed glad to see me shake free of cotton wool and yet he actually resents my work and my office, talks about "holding my horses," and going slowly, and now you, in this new letter, sound warning.

I've rusted long enough, it's work now, with one short interval. Write and tell me I may come to Middle West as soon as this operation is over; shan't I deserve a little reward for winning out, as I mean to do? I don't want to write to a spirit lady; I want to see Margaret Bevington; I want—well, I want to come.

M. A. L.

Margaret Bevington to M. A. Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, February.

Yes, it is best that you come to Middle West. Something is wrong, something is awry in my soul; it can only be made straight when we meet face to face, here, by the hearthstone that has become to me the symbol of home. I believe that here we could have speech together; I believe you are great enough to understand.

So when the time comes, come to me, but let me know; it is possible that I might be away for a little space.

The loneliness is no one's fault save my own; it comes from within, not from without; it is of a sort that you have not suffered.

But enough of me; I had not meant to say so much—and so little—in my last letter, but you divined.

It may be—I do not know—that I shall not write again until we meet. If so, you are to

know that all is well with me as to material things, you are not to worry—and you will not come until you are free.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., February.

Helen, in a little time I am coming home. I know the latchstring is out, even though you are not there. I am going back as to a refuge, where I can cleanse me of my untruth, which clings to me and will not be gone while I stay beneath this roof.

The longer we live, the more unlovely truths do we find out about ourselves; this "adventure in human nature" has revealed to me that I can live a lie with unmoved face, though not with unmoved heart, and that I can be a coward!

I cannot reveal my falsehood here, where

he has trusted me and where he has written to Margaret Bevington in faith and homage of spirit. I cannot do it, Helen, in this now familiar place, which is *his* place.

I can't see his expression change and the light that I have kindled in his eyes die out, perhaps never to live there again! If, in order that I may once more stand with upright spirit, I must kill his resurrected belief in woman, at least I cannot do it here.

So I am coming home, and he will come to me there, and I believe that is the best way. I can meet him there as Margaret Bevington, with no disguises, and by your hearth, Helen, I can let him learn the truth.

I feel as though his verdict wouldn't be so harsh, in such time and place, and there's where I'm a coward, child, for his belief has grown to mean a great deal to me—I don't quite know how I can face life without it.

It will be some space of time before I come; he has taken up his practice again and has a

case on hand which he must see through. It's his fine, stern, unyielding honor, which makes me so ashamed, I who once had kinship with him in that, as in other things.

I'll take the holiday which Miss Pratt hasn't yet enjoyed, and go to Middle West a little ahead of him. I know Jack will give me welcome. How blessed of him to send me his masterpiece. The picture has helped to make me feel the depths of my iniquity—for the woman he painted had naught to hide, and could hold her head high!

It was strange, Helen, that Mr. Langtree should divine that the picture represented Margaret Bevington.

His attitude toward it showed my simple disguise to be complete; he caught not the slightest resemblance, but stood silent; it was as though he bowed his head before a shrine.

You can imagine the miserable sinner I felt, and I can't tell you the strangeness of the feeling that came over me; I was as jealous of

my idealized self as though it had been another woman; in short, Helen, each half of me is jealous of the other half; this affair of having a self-imposed dual personality has long ceased to be a thing for laughter—it has become a thing for tears, if ever I shed them.

There are times when I hold my hands to my head and cry out against this woman that I've invented. Thank heaven, Miss Pratt's not a bad sort. I feel sure she'll play fair with me, and I have a queer sort of feeling that I must play fair with her. However, that's neither here nor there.

I was telling you about the picture and Mr. Langtree. When next he wrote me he asked me the plain, straightforward question, "Are you the Madonna of the Roses?" I made him Jesuitical answer, without the Jesuit's sophistical excuse of "an end that sanctifies the means," and like the true-hearted gentleman that he is, he believes me.

Now that I have decided to do the square thing, I am impatient for the time to come. I had thought once that he need never know; that with his increase of health and his lessening need of me, "Miss Pratt" could leave in a matter-of-course way, and Margaret Bevington could fade gradually from his horizon, but I can't do so currish a thing; the man must know the truth, no matter how much it hurts—either of us.

This is a selfish letter, dear, but you'll forgive. Hold the children close and kiss them for me. How I want to see you.

If only I could wipe out the last six months and be back in the garden as we were the day I first conceived this adventure—and yet—I wonder, if I do wish it?

My love, always.

MARGARET.

M. A. Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., February, 1914.

DEAR MARGARET BEVINGTON:

Your note was handed to me just as I left the house for consultation at the hospital, and I saved the opening until I could be alone. And now I am alone with it and its forerunners and face—I know not what.

I have tried to read every one of your letters calmly, for I would not have one glint of injustice; and I can find in none of them anything but the generous friendship of a beautiful soul striving to help up into the light one upon whom darkness had fallen.

As I study word after word I am constantly drawn toward the letter of the bittersweet pilgrimage and its successor which champions so splendidly the man of the Middle West. I had forgotten him, egotist that I am, and frankly because I did not want to think of him.

Then, too, it is impossible to put an inflection down in black and white, and as a consequence I have read your letters in the tone I craved and according to my mood—yes, even I, who had been used to think of temperament as a thing to be buried at the crossroads.

I am trying to be worthy of your friendship, but I cannot forget that you speak of loneliness, and I cannot make myself understand.

I can only ask you for God's sake not to go "away" until I have seen you—you believe that I want whatever is for your best happiness, and that I trust you as man never before trusted woman, for there has not been such another woman.

But you must see me, you must, for both our sakes you must and will.

M. A. L.

Is this incoherent? It has been a long, hard day and horribly hot for the time of

year. You will write me, for you alone know, next to myself, how I need the words you send.

M. L.

Telegram sent by Mark Langtree to Margaret Bevington

BOSTON, MASS., March, 1914.

TO MRS. MARGARET BEVINGTON,

HOLLYHOCK LODGE, MIDDLE WEST.

Leave to-morrow for Middle West. Please wait. Operation successful. Patient did not fail to rally.

MARK LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., March, 1914.

Only a word, Helen, to tell why your letters haven't been answered—why I haven't come.

Mr. Langtree is dangerously ill with

pneumonia. The crisis isn't passed, but the doctor lets me hope. I can't leave him.

I know I am in part to blame for this illness, though there were other causes—exertion after years of inaction, nervous strain of fighting for a life, the wretched spring weather, all had part in the smash, but Margaret Bevington is guilty of much.

He hadn't been well for days, but forced himself to go on until he had won, then came home, flushed with fever and triumph. Next day too ill to leave his room—refused to see the doctor, in revolt against self-pampering; became delirious and unmanageable. I went to him. He looked at me with wild eyes and muttered strange things in his delirium.

I alone can quiet him. He is too sick to leave; an illness like this, which brings death so near, pushes all petty personal things aside. I can think of nothing but his welfare; he must get well; after that—I don't know.

Love to you.

MARGARET.

Mark Langtree in delirium

Margaret—Margaret—Margaret—come to me—They keep moving me from place to place—they're subtle—Did they know I started to go to you?—Did they hear your loneliness echoing through my soul?—My Margaret—my darling—lonely, and waiting for me.—My arms ache to hold you, shield you from all that can hurt.—I want to kiss—not the hem of your garments, but your dear mouth—I'm not a devotee worshiping a saint, but a man seeking his mate—Platonics—God!—I want my one woman, I must get her before she goes away! Not all the men of the great west shall keep her from me—

I didn't tell them I was starting, but they knew—and sent the fog—what a fog! It never lifts—it never lifts—I couldn't fight through it and they crept up and caught me—fastened the weights to my feet, when I tried

to get to you, my wife—they wound the cords around my body and knotted them on my chest—they cut into me—every muscle was numbed—my throat was parched—I couldn't call to you. I begged a drop of water—they jeered, Margaret—the knot pressed down and down—each breath was a jagged fragment of torture—

I couldn't die, for I hadn't seen you—told you—and they knew,—How they fought—I should have lost, darling, but for you—they keep me always in the fog—I was giving up, when you came down out of the picture—my Rose Woman! The light in your starry eyes frightened them, for the world grew cool, they slunk away into the fog, afraid—and I knew you had saved me—you were so sweet—the scent of your hair as it swept my face—the touch of your hands as my head dropped into the curve of your shoulder—the mist of the rose garden closed over us—just we two, dear soul, we two,

with love and trust forever and forever and forever—

You're gone—the fog is thicker than ever—they're here again with the torture—this time it will be more horrible, for you will be tortured too—they've locked you up in the picture and you can't get out—you can't get out—and I can't come to you. And see—see—see it—they're coming closer—closer—Oh, so close—I can hear them; they're fiends, Margaret Bittersweet—yes, devils—and they're singing, singing their demon song—but I'll not cry out—neither of you would want that—I must be worthy of you both—I will get to the picture—I'm coming, Margaret, I'm coming—the fog, the fog—and the fiends' song—louder—louder—a strange song for devils to sing—it says—Oh, rest in the Lord and He will give you—what is it He will give—what—

It's death, Margaret—silent—cool—and the white spirit, who is and is not you—has

touched my head with her hand—there's a scent as of a night in spring—and the stars are falling out of the sky, one by one, like silver blossoms—

Music—the melody of the cloud-spirit—I begged her to save you too, Margaret Bittersweet—she will—she is more tender than the harmony she makes—tired—so tired—but no torture—not afraid—she will guard me—I know her now—I learned her name from a lame saint—it's Heart's Desire.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

(A letter that never was sent.)

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., March, 1914.

I'm sitting in this big, quiet room, dear, with the curtains drawn to make a soft dimness, my chair close to the bed where he lies in the sleep that is to heal him.

I have been down with him into the Valley

of the Shadow and the awe and the awfulness of the moment when Eternity's garment swept close, have not left me.

For days and nights uncounted this room has been the world to me—as though I dwelt on some newborn isle of consciousness—all else obliterated. Here I fought with Death and prevailed over him for this man's life.

He lies so still and straight, his face white against the pillow, he breathes so quietly, that fear seizes me lest he breathe not at all. I put my hand on his and know the fear is groundless.

His face looks singularly young in sleep, though gray hair has come thickly at the temples. The lines of bitterness have faded, the shadow of a sneer is gone; it is as though a hand had lifted the light mask and revealed the man as God intended him. About his eyes are marks of sorrow, and over his lids there is a strange gentleness, as though in all

his life henceforth he would regard nothing with harshness. Pray God it may be so—that the revelation of my deception may not destroy the new sweetness of his vision, even though I go alone into outer darkness.

Before that time comes, I must endure the shame and the bitterness a little longer, for his sake. He will write soon to Margaret Bevington, and I must answer—God help me—in the old way of tenderness.

I scarce have slept, for I alone could soothe him. He thought me the Madonna of the Roses—your rose gown, Helen.—He clung to me, begged me to save him from terrors that pursued him, and sank into quiet like a child when I drew his head to my shoulder and spoke his name.

So I have cared for him, answered his piteous calls, hushed against my heart the revelations of his delirium, watched and guarded and tended, held and cherished—and so saved him.

He sleeps now beneath my hand, and my heart enfolds him.

I can see no farther than this moment, I can make no plan; something greater than myself has this in charge; I only know that he has grown dearer to me than anything life has ever held—

This was to have been a letter to Helen; it has become a confession to myself. I will write her differently when next he sleeps, but now he is waking, turns to me, needs me—speaks my name.

Mark Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., March, 1914.

That I could not come you never doubted. I can't tell how I know it, but I do. It's the quality of you.

I'm better, but I've been ill. From the manner of dear old Perkins, who is like a fussy hen and shakes hands with me every

time he comes in, I infer that this time it was a true bill. They say it's only days, and she never deceives, but it seems so long since I tried to come to you. And now they talk "patience." Curse the word, but I will try—only I must hear from you—you must write me of yourself; you must wait until I come, and you must want me to come—Oh, very much.

I'm badly spoiled, dear. Miss Pratt is wonderful; she's playing as I write—such music. To this extent do I get my own way. They indulge me as though I might cry if crossed, and who knows? Spoiled, Margaret, spoiled.

Darling—write.

MARK.

Margaret Bevington to Mark Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, March, 1914.

I knew you could not come, Mark, knew that you were sick, and now there is no place

for any trouble in my heart—only joy because you will soon be well.

Let us rest for a little space, in this hour that is given us, asking no question of the future. "Our times are in His hands," and so now a little season of drifting, with faith unspoiled. Close your eyes, dear, while this strange little boat of ours drifts on, and dream that I am near you—as I am, Mark.

MARGARET.

Mark Langtree to Margaret Bevington

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., April, 1914.

Margaret—I'm coming, if you will welcome me.

Am I the most ungrateful dog unhung to feel a savage joy at the rout of such friends? They fought a valiant but losing battle, and in defeat showed the nobility of true heroes — Perkins a puzzled trump — Miss Pratt

seriously sympathetic, blessedly helpful—neither even thinking a question.

Miss Pratt denies it, but she's woefully tired, and why not? Can I ever hope to prove to her how greatly I value her friendship? But that is for the future—

I wait your letter, happy, but oh, my dear, so apprehensive—for why should you give aught of your glory to so poor a things as—

MARK LANGTREE.

Margaret Bevington to Mark Langtree

HOLLYHOCK LODGE,
MIDDLE WEST, April, 1914.

No, Mark, you must not come—not now, not ever. Once I thought otherwise, but now I know. We are never to meet, never to hear—there is to be no more bond between us.

You will not seek to find me; it would be no use. I am going away. When this reaches you I shall not be here.

These are harsh words, and I cannot explain any of the "why." Only this—that it is not as you think; there is no one else; in all my life there has been no one—else.

There seem to be things that one should say at the end of so dear a friendship. I must leave them for your divining, as I leave myself for your judging.

MARGARET BEVINGTON.

Margaret Bevington to Helen Mayberry

BEVERLY, MASS., April, 1914.

Write me here at Beverly, Helen, where I have fled from 13 Marble Street. Dr. Perkins and Father Trevor helped me. I could endure it no longer. Mr. Langtree is better, his need for me is passed, so the doctor told him I must rest, and Father Trevor found a quiet haven for me—a little place of grass and flowers about a gray cottage where

simple people live. They are his friends and kind to me for his sake.

I have seen my last of Prides Crossing. On the surface I have gone because I need rest, but Mr. Langtree knew when I said good-by that we were not to meet again.

For I can't go on with it any more. Once I thought to tell him the truth, but his illness made that impossible, so now I am taking myself out of his life. He does not know where I am. I shall stay in Beverly for a little while, and then, I do not know.

My love goes to you all.

MARGARET.

Mark Langtree Sets the Matter Forth

13 MARBLE STREET,
PRIDES CROSSING, MASS., April, 1914.

It must be written down. I cannot see it in my mind, cannot be fair to any of us.

But it shall not be the summing up of a case, as I had thought, for by what right

should I appoint myself a judge to tabulate the pros and cons and pass even upon myself, and how should I be just to them?

Where is the wisdom, the insight that shall lead me to know which one of us should be defendant and which plaintiff?

Surely the years, in league with Fate, bear with them as they pass all the poor shreds of man's much cherished ego, every "I will" and "I will not," of his so blatant certainty, all the poor sureness of that supreme center—self.

How many bloody lashings must he take ere he be willing to stand beaten and stripped of his bluff, like the small bully of a common school, quivering beneath the heel of Life, and beg the saline balm of understanding? How long stand whimpering 'neath its stinging cure? How much is he to learn, and, God, how humbly, e'er he dare say, without a boast, "I have lived—I know—perhaps a little?"

Oh, my two women, stranger saints, so different and so dear, who out of your great hearts have re-created me a man. I cannot choose but love you both, for you yourselves have dowered me with this double crown of love, and in its flame there lives no seed of shame nor of disloyalty, for like a beggar at the gate, seeing both rose and lily, shall it harm either if at heart he needs must crave them both!

I would not have you know the ache, nor see the stinging tears, nor guess the empty loneliness that now preëmpts my soul.

The price is not too great; I pay it without grudge; it gives to me the right to say, my love is worthy yours, e'en though I have it not. For now I know it was but gentle pity, woman's tenderness, eternal motherhood, but never love. The fault was mine, I did deceive myself.

But I will live, e'en though we may never meet, so as to earn your dear approval.

Yes, work I will—'tis you have taught its balm—and laugh I will, for you would have it so; and love you both I must until the end, when I do pray of our exacting God to grant to me the power to understand.

Margaret Bevington's Diary

BEVERLY, MASS., May, 1914.

I seem to have returned to the old days of the north, when silence wrapped me as a garment, because there was none with whom I could have any speech of the heart. Now I can no longer write it out to Helen—I have no right and no desire. So I betake to self communion in a diary.

And, yet—what have I to say, save to ask of life the eternal questions—Why? What is it to be?

There seems to be no reason for going on—save that one must—no reason for turning to the east rather than the west. I am

weary of traveling; for the first time in my life I am weary of my kind.

I do not want to go to Helen—the gentleness of her eyes would hurt too much, the touch of little Dick's hands would be more than I could endure.

For it was harder than I knew, to go out from the stately old sheltering house by the sea and know that I should not enter its doors again; to put my hand calmly in his, friendly-wise, know it to be the last touch and give no sign; to deal him this further hurt of desertion and give no reason, that was the worst.

When I think of him now it is always as the figure of that last moment—a figure more than ever tall, because so thin, his face with its new lines, gentled by suffering, the once so scornful eyes holding a kind of grave and sweet beneficence, a stanch, unquestioning faith.

The question that did possess him, well I know, was not of me, but for me, and all

tangled up with it the eternal questioning of himself and of his love for two women. Never, I think, was honorable gentleman so beset.

His illness and recovery made it all clear.

Daily he grew more and more to depend upon me, more and more turned to me expectantly, with a childlike trustfulness that sat strangely and yet sweetly upon him.

He loved to have me play for him—that barrier fell in the days of his fever, when my music sometimes was all that quieted him. The night before I left I played his sonata.

It was the first time he had heard its vesture of living sound—a lovely thing, leading from troubled questioning to serene and perfect dawning of peace. The playing of it was my real farewell, telling him that I should not return. I gave him good-night at its close. He held my hand in a close and possessing clasp, then released it. "You know best," he said. That was all.

What else could he say, with the glamour of Margaret Bevington over him, the spell of her spiritual touch possessing him, the mystery of her luring him, man-wise, to the quest?

How strangely, through all the last weeks, I have cast a jealous eye on my other self. In the midst of his gentlest dependency upon me she would come with quiet, intruding presence; his eyes would soften and glow as though an inner flame had been lighted, and he would lie withdrawn in dreams.

I know so well the day he first realized how it was with him.

It was a moment of perfect accord and understanding, wrapping us in protecting silence.

Then came the intruder, stepping soundlessly. I too saw the vision as he saw it—the apotheosis of Margaret Bevington as the Rose Mother of the picture.

The half-smile of particular beauty came

to his lips for her, as always. Then it changed to sudden, sharp questioning, as though he had been struck a blow. He looked at me—agony in his eyes, great drops on his brow. He lifted one hand to shade his eyes—I rose, drew the curtains to make twilight in the room, and left him.

I knew then that I must go away. Next morning, when I intercepted his final letter to Margaret Bevington in the outgoing post I knew I must go quickly; I could not be there when he read the last cruel letter that I must write.

Dr. Perkins brings me word of him, now and again, terse words that tell me he is getting well; words punctuated by shrewd, puzzled glances from the good doctor's keen gray eyes. He does not understand—how should he?

- - - - -

The days are desert empty. In the swarming life of Beverly's industrialism I am alone

as never before. Once I would have filled the days with work; there is plenty here to do. Once I would have loved it, but not now.

Father Trevor looks at me in gentle, grave puzzlement. Naturally he wonders what has become of his helpful friend, who used to whisk over in Dr. Perkins's automobile and give him a hand with sick children and forlorn old women in her brief hour of escape from Marble Street.

I, too, wonder where she is—if I shall ever see her again, or if this strange, numb, uncaring person has come to stay for alway. I do not like myself, but I can't care even about that.

Once or twice I have driven with Dr. Perkins, because it was too much trouble to withstand him. Yesterday we left the town behind us and drove over level roads between bare brown fields that smell of spring. I'm glad he comes, for only so do I have any word of Mark.

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The daffodils are pushing up brave, slender swords beneath the cottage window.

I wonder if those in the old grounds by the sea will blossom this springtime. Now I know that I looked upon their planting as an augury of what might come with their blooming. Strange, I have waited all my life to love, and now, when gladly I would bend my head in surrender, I must turn away from life's fulfillment. I have been the destroyer of my own happiness—worse, the destroyer of his.

Dr. Perkins told me yesterday that Mark had gone down to his office—spoke of the iron determination that is serving him instead of strength. He should not have taken up his work yet.

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I have been very blind. I blame myself greatly, and yet I never dreamed—

Dr. Perkins has asked me to marry him.

Tells me he has loved me since—oh, almost the beginning, and that in the past weeks he has known vast need for me.

Bless his big and loyal heart. He said nothing at first, because he thought he saw in me a chance of happiness for Mark, and now out of the chaos of those delirium-filled nights he has emerged with the belief that Mark loves another than Miss Pratt—the unknown “Margaret” of his beseechings. So he feels free to come to me.

His bluff homage rings true as steel and touches me infinitely, but there is only one answer I can make, and so I am poorer than yesterday, since there is one person less to whom I can draw near. I shall miss him.

I suppose I should have known that it would make no difference—that he would continue to come and be, as always, my rough-and-ready, helpful friend. He stayed

away four days and then drove up and blew a goodly blast on his horn, quite like a knight of old. He brought daffodils from Mark's garden—long-stemmed, golden chalices, from the bulbs planted in frozen ground. We drove, and his talk was all of Mark. I know he is worried. Mark is working too hard, there is no one to stop him.

To-day a box came from Helen. It held a new gown, soft and trailing, gray as twilight mist, with a gleam of silver here and there about it, like dew in moonlight; a poem of a gown. And there are little gray shoes with old silver buckles, and gloves and silken hosen to complete the toilette. Helen, Helen, did you think this raiment meet and fit for Bevely?

There's been little time to think of self the past fortnight, since the horrible fire swept through the factories of M—— our neighboring suburb, and left hundreds of

mained and suffering ones to be cared for. The hospitals could by no means take them all, and the little homes of Beverly's workers have been thrown open to the injured and helpless. So too the homes of the rich, from Back Bay to Brookline.

The terrible material realities of life have pressed so close that everything else has been pushed into the background. Out of that time of misery has grown an increasing sense of the fine stuff of human nature, the essential kinship of unrelated people, the fellowship of the poor, the fortitude of the unlettered, the grit and courage of men and women and frail girls suffering torments.

The day of the fire I saw Mark.

He had driven over to help. I saw him first as he lifted a moaning woman and placed her on a stretcher and took off his coat to put over her.

Dr. Perkins told me afterward that Mark worked all night and through the succeeding

days, invaluable in the hospital. Once or twice I have seen him from a distance.

I keep away from relief headquarters, lest we meet, and there is plenty for me to do elsewhere. We have three badly burned women in the cottage, and to care for them and for others in the neighborhood has filled days and nights.

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To-day Mark walked past the cottage, unknowing of who watched him. He was alone and off guard. One look told me of the loneliness, the hopelessness, that companion him now.

He is like some dear and gallant leader of a forlorn hope, one who knows it useless to attempt the hill and yet will spur on to the charge, head and courage high until the last. He looks so infinitely weary, weary of heart and soul and body, and yet so gallant withal. Dear God, what shall I do?

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August, 1914.

Belgium despoiled and captive, war declared in France, Germany sending out menacing hordes, England rushing troops to the rescue —into what nightmare has the world fallen!

Even here the sinister influence at work, if Dr. Perkins surmises aright. There have been two more fires at M——, cruel, mysterious fires, like the first one, bringing death and anguish and wiping out vast stores of material invaluable in war.

No one knows how any of these fires started. All the places were well watched and safeguarded. In the last two not so many were hurt. They were at night, when smaller shifts were working.

Dr. Perkins is a sturdy Yankee, and his hatred of the Germans goes back to the Revolution and the Hessians, but I gather from his intimations that there is real cause for believing the fires were incendiary. Close watch is being kept.

These fresh disasters have given me much to do; have pushed the aching self out of the days, leaving only the nights for her occupancy. There has been so much to fill hands and heart: cruel wounds to dress, suffering to assuage, families to cheer and help, children to be clothed and tended—an endless round whose very burdens themselves brought strength to grapple with them.

Dr. Perkins says I have the makings of a surgical nurse and praises my work. "No nonsense about you, Miss Pratt; you're equal to many a hospital nurse," he said one day. Well, I have learned many things, and it is a comfort to know one's hands capable of good offices.

All the word that comes from France points to an invasion of Mark's dear country of the Haute-Marne. How will he bear it—what will he do? If they reach Paris, God help the world.

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September, 1914.

Mark is going to France. Dr. Perkins told me to-day. He began to place his affairs in order when France declared war. Since the battle of the Marne he has been rushing preparations.

The château in the Haute-Marne is to be made a hospital. Dr. Perkins goes with him, and another Boston surgeon, and two nurses. They will take stores of supplies for refugees and wounded.

Mark is arranging that his entire fortune may be drawn upon. He hopes to go to the front with the troops, as surgeon. This isn't decided. If they accept him for that service, Dr. Perkins will take charge of the work at the château; if not, he and Mark will carry it on together. Mark's only thought now is how he can best serve France.

How he loves her—his only bride, this love of his youth, ardent and ideal! How far away now seems the Christmas night when

we sat together by the fireside and he talked of France and Noël—how all the ice and stiffness melted away and left him human and dear, with a kind of courtly charm, heightened by simplicity. The best of two lands seemed to meet and mingle in him that night, when I sat, disguised, and listened.

How small and useless now seem those self-accusings.

How the small sins sink into utter littleness in supreme hours, when the brute force that would crush and spoil and smirch all that humanity holds sacred is being held at bay by those men of France, gallant heirs of her ancient chivalry, whose blood is being drained in one glad sacrifice, a libation poured for the world.

All that matters now is sacrifice, service, love.—But I can't let you go alone, Mark, *I can't.*

That evening Margaret Bevington brushed the silvery sweep of her hair into the soft halo that had framed her face before the day of Martha Pratt. She clothed herself in the gown of mist and silver, covered it with a cloak of twilight gray, and turned with a gesture of farewell as she went out from the cottage which had sheltered her.

It was dusk when she reached Prides Crossing, and the stars were rising out of the sea. The garden was filled with the odor of night waters, mingled with the scent of Madonna lilies lifting gleaming chalices against the dark laurels. She bent over them, touching their petals softly. Then she broke off a clustered spear and went on through the garden to a side vestibule leading into the wide hall.

She paused a moment in the library door, left partly open. In the deepening dusk she saw him by the table in the embrasure, half

revealed by the desk lamp which shone on the map over which he bent.

She moved silently to the fireplace, where glowing embers and leaping flame made a place of light, throwing the rest of the room into deeper shadow.

Then she heard her own voice—"Mark—"

He turned, sprang up, looking at the slender spirit shape in the firelight, vague against surrounding shadows.

"Margaret—" he said.

"Yes, Mark," she answered. Into the two words went all the tenderness, the faith, and the surrender of Margaret Bevington's soul. They fell on the man's heart like a voice from a world other than this—a world once dreamed of, upon which a door had closed.

So he stood—not moving, lest the vision fade, and waited, that it might speak again.

The room seemed to reach out hands to

claim her. Recent days fell away as though they had not been.

Unconsciously she turned to the remembered ministry of the candles, became again the priestess of the evening.

She took a waxen taper from the copper urn and bent to light it at the embers, which flared into new flame. She touched it to the candles in the old bronzes on the mantel, and drifted slowly around the room, lifting her taper to those in the burnished sconces, to the clustered ones of the candelabra on the piano, to the Roman lamp beneath the portrait of the little grande dame, and came last, as of old, to the table in the embrasure.

As she made pilgrimage around the room, in the soft grayness of her gown, leaving a trail of delicate, waving flames, Mark Langtree, seeing the familiar movement, the bending grace, the line of lifted arm, remembered and knew.

She stood a moment beside the table before

she lighted the candles there, and turned to lift her eyes to his.

He reached out his hand and touched hers as it rested on the dark wood, and then he drew her close, and bent his head down to her hair in a long silence.

“Margaret,” he said at last, brokenly, “both of you—both of you!”

She moved a little away from him.—“Mark, forgive me——”

“Hush dear—my dear.” He cherished her in his arms. “Saint Margaret, Margaret Bittersweet—I understand, dear,—I know, I know,”—and then, “Heart’s Desire—Heart’s Desire, I love you; I love you!”

She stirred in his arms and he released her, placing her in the high-backed oaken chair with a movement of tender homage. The ottoman no longer stood beside it, and Margaret, missing it, knew that his soul was healed from all sickness of the past.

He picked up the lilies and laid them across

her lap, and knelt beside her with a low cry of beseeching.

"Margaret—put your arms around me dear—I want to be loved."

Margaret Bevington's eyes darkened and shone softly, like veiled stars, and her lips parted in a half smile, tender beyond all words, as she gathered him to her with the gesture that enfolded him when she held him away from death. She heard his sigh of happiness as his head found its resting place in the curve of her shoulder.

She drew her fingers softly over his eyelids with a touch light as dew at evening, and then down until her hand rested on his heart.

As she felt the tide of his life throbbing beneath her hand, she knew suddenly the sanctuary in the heart of passion, even as peace dwells in the center of the storm. "Your heart, dear love," she murmured, "your dear heart." She bent her head until her mouth met his.

"Mark," she said, "I came because I couldn't let you go without me—I love you so——"

He lifted his head—"You'll come with me, darling—Margaret, God never was so good to man before. We'll go to France together; we both love her——"

He stopped, seeing her face transfigured, the light of a vision in her eyes.

She put her hand at the back of his head, in the tenderest caress woman can give to man. "Yes," she said, "we'll go together, Mark, through our gate of fulfillment."

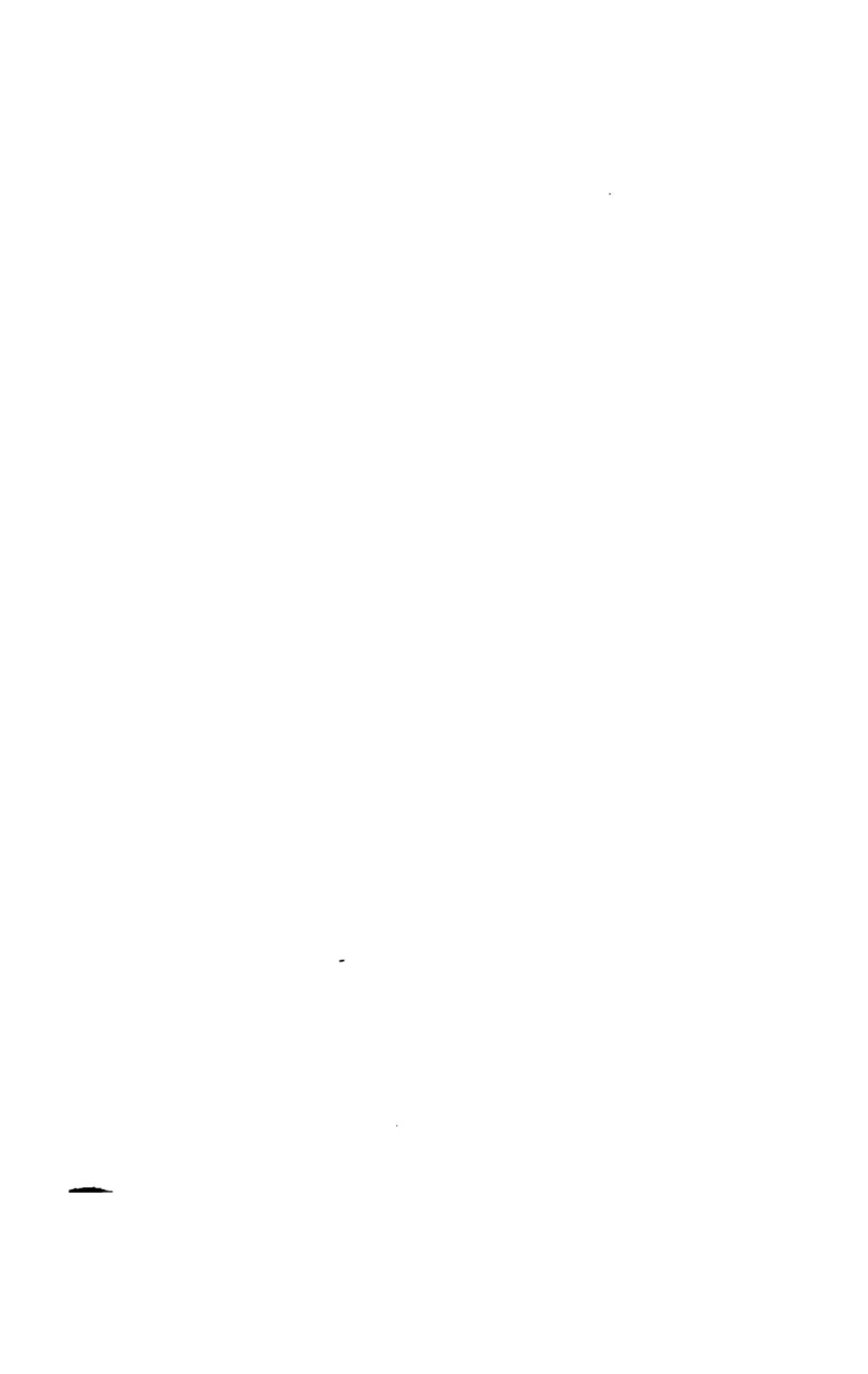
He kissed the curve of her shoulder. "The wonder of you," he said, "the dear wonder and the beauty of you. We may not be together long, Margaret; I go with the army if they want me——"

"Yes, Mark, wherever, in whatever way."

"In this room, dear one," he said; "and you will wear this gown, Margaret; Father

Trevor will come and his boys will sing—in the garden they will sing, as they did on Noël night, ‘Rest in the Lord, and He will give thee thy heart’s desire! ’”

THE END



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